United Nations

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

General Assembly

Official Records • Fifty-second Session
Supplement No.12 (A/52/12)

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United Nations • New York, 1997

NOTE

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ISSN 0251 8023

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. The world's refugee population decreased from 14.5 million to 13.2 million in 1996. Similarly, the overall population of concern to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) fell to some 26.1 million, of whom 3.3 million were repatriated refugees in the early stages of their reintegration, 4.7 million were internally displaced persons and 4.9 million were others of humanitarian concern, for the most part victims of conflict. Reflecting the increasing focus on voluntary repatriation as a solution for many of the world's refugees, over 1 million refugees returned to their country of origin in 1996.

2. No massive new refugee influxes were experienced in 1996 and the first quarter of 1997. Nevertheless, the conflict that engulfed eastern Zaire and the sudden and large-scale return of Rwandans from Zaire and the United Republic of Tanzania at the end of 1996 posed unprecedented challenges for UNHCR, both in terms of providing humanitarian assistance in the midst of conflict and of supporting massive reintegration in a fragile post-conflict environment.

3. While confronting ongoing emergencies in many parts of the world, the Office also continued its efforts to promote and consolidate solutions to problems of displacement. In the former Yugoslavia, UNHCR began phasing out its emergency humanitarian programme and reoriented its efforts in support of the peace process, focusing in particular on the identification of solutions for refugees and displaced persons. Elsewhere, a milestone in terms of solutions was the conclusion of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indochinese Refugees,[1] which marked the final chapter of more than 20 years of international humanitarian efforts to resolve the aftermath of the conflict in Indochina.

4. The numerous problems posed by humanitarian crises again highlighted the need to adopt comprehensive approaches to the complex problems of displacement. A significant initiative in that respect was the convening of a regional conference to address the problem of refugees, displaced persons, other forms of involuntary displacement and returnees in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and relevant neighbouring States. The Conference, which took place in May 1996, adopted a Programme of Action which encompassed a comprehensive range of solution-oriented and preventive measures aimed at addressing actual and potential problems of displacement in the region.

5. While encouraged by the progress made towards achieving solutions in a number of regions, UNHCR remained deeply concerned about restrictive trends in the granting of asylum in many parts of the world. In its efforts to find solutions, UNHCR also continued to be confronted by a number of protection issues, notably the international protection aspects of return and reintegration, particularly in situations emerging from conflict.

6. During the period under review (1 January 1996-31 March 1997), the emergency preparedness and response capacity of UNHCR continued to be developed and reinforced. An emphasis on contingency planning and new training initiatives, and the extension of those initiatives to include other United Nations and non-governmental organizations, has enhanced the ability of UNHCR to respond to refugee emergencies and to coordinate its activities with other operational agencies.

7. The Office also continued to develop its institutional capacity to manage voluntary repatriation operations, ensuring that lessons were learnt from past reintegration operations. It also continued its efforts to build operational linkages with development organizations in order to ensure sustainable solutions for refugees in the aftermath of emergencies.

8. Efforts to integrate the needs and concerns of refugee women and children into protection and assistance programmes have derived additional impetus from the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing from 4 to 15 September 1995,[2] and the report on the impact of armed conflict on children.[3] Ventures, such as the Bosnian Women's Initiative and a similar programme in Rwanda, have enhanced the Office's operational capacity to address these needs.

9. In 1996, UNHCR received a total of some US$ 970 million in voluntary contributions towards its General and Special Programmes. By 31 March 1997, a total of US$ 404 million had been received against General and Special Programmes requirements, amounting to some US$ 1.2 billion.

CHAPTER II

INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

A. Introduction

10. The primary functions of UNHCR are to provide international protection to refugees and to seek permanent solutions to their problems by assisting Governments to facilitate their voluntary repatriation, or their assimilation within new national communities. The legal basis for these functions is provided by the Statute of the Office, approved by the General Assembly in resolution 428 (V) of 14 December 1950, which defines the work of the High Commissioner as entirely non-political, humanitarian and social. The activities of the Office are further reinforced and guided by subsequent General Assembly resolutions, and the conclusions and decisions of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, and are carried out within the framework of international refugee, human rights and humanitarian law, and internationally accepted standards for the treatment of refugees.

11. International protection means first of all securing respect for the basic rights of refugees, including admission to safety and non-refoulement, as well as ensuring that refugees are accorded favourable treatment in countries of asylum. It also means promoting the ratification by States of the relevant international instruments and the incorporation of those instruments into national legislation.

12. The protection of refugees is, however, also inextricably linked to the search for and the attainment of durable solutions to the refugee problem. In this connection, the Executive Committee, at its forty-seventh session, adopted as the topic of its annual theme "Pursuit and implementation of durable solutions". The adoption of this theme highlighted the emphasis given by the international community to voluntary repatriation as a durable solution and asserted that a natural extension of that emphasis is the increased importance attached to the prevention of forced displacement.

13. As part of its efforts to promote and consolidate voluntary repatriation and to prevent new displacement, UNHCR activities in countries of origin have expanded very rapidly in the past few years. In addressing the problems of finding solutions and prevention of forced displacement, UNHCR continued to be confronted by a number of protection issues which warranted further consideration, notably the international protection aspects of return and reintegration, particularly in situations emerging from conflict. In addition, because UNHCR does not have an exclusive mandate or a monopoly of expertise in addressing the problems of prevention, improved coordination with other humanitarian, human rights and development organizations is becoming an increasingly important facet of UNHCR operations.

14. There is growing awareness that lasting solutions to complex emergencies that give rise to refugees require comprehensive approaches by the international community; these include addressing the root causes, strengthening emergency preparedness and response, providing effective protection and achieving durable solutions. In an informal note on international protection presented to the Executive Committee at its forty-seventh session in 1996, emphasis was placed on the importance of protection-based comprehensive approaches which focus on human rights. The note highlighted such fundamental rights as the right to seek and enjoy asylum, the right to personal security and non-discrimination, as well as

the rights of refugees as embodied in international instruments relating to refugees. The responsibility of States to respect such rights was also emphasized. After having considered the note, the Executive Committee, at its forty-seventh session, adopted a conclusion on comprehensive and regional approaches within a protection framework,[4] which identified certain principal elements of protection-based comprehensive approaches and encouraged States, in coordination and cooperation with each other, and with international organizations, if applicable, to consider the adoption of such approaches.

B. Securing the rights of refugees

15. During the period under review, there was a reduction in global refugee figures to an estimated 13.2 million but an increase in the estimated number of internally displaced persons. The growing numbers of internally displaced persons reflect both the nature of more recent conflicts, and the growing number of obstacles to obtaining asylum. While thousands of asylum-seekers have been admitted and given refuge in many parts of the world, attitudes have hardened in others, resulting in a range of protection problems including refoulement at the border, establishment of institutional structures which severely restrict admission, restrictive application of the refugee criteria for individual asylum-seekers, and new legal measures in international forums that would automatically exclude certain categories of asylum-seekers from refugee status.

16. The Office continued to meet the protection and humanitarian needs of internally displaced persons in such places as the North Caucasus region and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. While the general mandate of UNHCR does not extend to internally displaced persons, its role in that respect was reaffirmed by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/152 of 21 December 1995. In that resolution, the Assembly reaffirmed its support for the High Commissioner's efforts to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to such persons, on the basis of specific requests from the Secretary-General or the competent principal organs of the United Nations and with the consent of the State concerned.

17. In view of increasing concern that States throughout the world are frequently resorting to the detention of asylum-seekers, and in order to clarify those international norms which relate to their detention, UNHCR issued a set of guidelines which elaborated on what UNHCR regards as the minimum standards for State practices in that regard.

18. During the period under review, UNHCR was engaged in informal consultations with a number of States on the subject of ensuring international protection to all who need it. Two meetings were held at Geneva, the first on 2 and 3 May 1996 and a second on 17 and 18 December 1996. Participants at the first meeting sought to identify issues for further study and agreed that temporary protection was one area that warranted further examination. A study commissioned by UNHCR on temporary protection was used as a basis for discussions at the second meeting. Further informal consultations are planned for 1997 and 1998.

19. The Office has also continued to play an active role in intergovernmental consultations aimed at harmonizing national laws and procedures, especially in Europe, and has sought to promote comprehensive regional approaches which combine the commitment to provide protection to those who require it with clear policies for immigration and development assistance, and appropriate information strategies.

20. Another issue which was explored during the period under review relates to the return of persons not in need of international protection. In that regard, UNHCR prepared an informal paper for consideration by the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee. In that paper, the background to the problem was examined, as was the definition of the term "persons not in need of international protection", and the scope of the problem, and the responsibility of States in this area was highlighted. The limited role of UNHCR in this area was also emphasized.

21. Recognizing that serious violations of human rights are a cause of population movements, UNHCR has, with the encouragement of the Executive Committee and the General Assembly, sought to strengthen its cooperation with the human rights bodies of the United Nations. The aim of strengthening such cooperation is to promote effective responses to human rights problems which are generating, or are threatening to generate, flows of refugees and displaced persons, or which impede voluntary return. The High Commissioner's statement to the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-second session drew attention to the central place of human rights in the process of post-conflict peace-building, highlighted the new initiatives engaged in by UNHCR in safeguarding the human rights of returnees and stressed the ultimate responsibility of States, with the support of the international community, to protect the human rights of their populations.

22. An important aspect of the work of UNHCR continued to be the monitoring of the safety of refugees who have chosen to be repatriated. The Office has continued to promote, wherever possible, strategies which may contribute to stabilizing fragile situations and attenuating the underlying causes of refugee flows. This is seen most prominently in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where UNHCR funded reconstruction and is involved in other areas of rehabilitation and reintegration. Inter-entity returns, especially to the Bosnian Serb entity, continue to pose protection challenges. In Rwanda and Burundi, UNHCR concluded a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Human Rights Field Operation in order to facilitate better collaboration in the monitoring of returnees and related areas. In that regard, the work of the International Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda is of special interest to UNHCR.

23. The Rwandan refugee crisis continued to pose daunting challenges which called for creative strategies to afford effective protection to refugees in militarized camps, while at the same time identifying those who did not deserve international protection and effectively excluding them from the benefits of such protection. The Office has observed that the cooperation of the host Government is essential if this challenge is to be met. Another important lesson learned is the need for UNHCR to give sufficient priority to protection considerations in its formulation of overall policies and to ensure adequate capacity for protection in the field in the early stages of an emergency.

24. In Central and Eastern Europe, the Office has increased its efforts to establish an active presence and has undertaken a variety of protection activities, including promoting accession to the 1951 Convention[5] and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees,[6] training, and providing advice on refugee legislation and procedures for determining the status of refugees. It has also given advice on constitutional, refugee and citizenship provisions, with advice on the latter to, inter alia, avoid the creation of stateless persons. The Office has also increased its collaboration with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), with the aim of ensuring that refugee issues are prominent on its agenda.

25. After the adoption of the 1995 Executive Committee conclusion on the prevention and reduction of statelessness,[7] UNHCR actively promoted with Governments accession to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons[8] and the 1961 Convention on the reduction of statelessness.[9] In that connection, UNHCR prepared and distributed an information and accession package and also provided advice to some Governments on issues relating to citizenship and statelessness. During the course of 1996, Brazil and Guatemala acceded to the 1954 Convention, Bosnia and Herzegovina acceded to the 1961 Convention, and Azerbaijan acceded to both the 1954 and the 1961 Conventions. The protection of stateless persons and actions taken by States to reduce statelessness would contribute to preventing one possible cause of refugee flows.

26. In April 1996, UNHCR issued the Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation which sets out the role of the Office in the various stages of the voluntary repatriation process and provides a practical guide to field staff, non-governmental organizations and governmental counterparts in various operational activities related to voluntary repatriation.

27. In continuation of its efforts to address the protection problems of refugee children, a symposium on unaccompanied children was organized by UNHCR and attended by major European countries. The Symposium took place on 19 and 20 September 1996, and a broad range of issues relating to unaccompanied children seeking asylum in Europe was discussed. After the Symposium, UNHCR finalized Guidelines on Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum, which was issued in February 1997. The guidelines cover a range of issues relating to the protection of unaccompanied minors, emphasize the special needs of unaccompanied children in the light of their vulnerability and advocate a comprehensive approach to their problem.

C. Promotion

28. South Africa and Kyrgyzstan acceded to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees during the reporting period, bringing the number of States parties to one or both instruments to 132.

29. Through its promotional activities, UNHCR sought to raise public awareness, strengthen knowledge and understanding of refugee issues, and to foster the effective implementation of international legal standards on behalf of refugees, returnees and other persons of concern to the Office, including by means of their incorporation into national legislation and administrative procedures. During the reporting period, UNHCR increased its promotional efforts at the regional level. To that end, the Office participated in various seminars and conferences on refugee issues, and organized refugee law and protection courses for governmental officials, implementing partners, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations in all regions of the world. The second part to a training module on human rights and refugee protection, part II: specific issues", was finalized and distributed. This training module provides a basis for the training of UNHCR staff members, implementing partners and governmental officials on the use of human rights standards in refugee protection.

30. The Office continued to monitor the work of the six treaty bodies and the Commission on Human Rights and its Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. During the period under review, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination adopted general recommendation XXII (49), concerning the right of refugees who are members of minorities to return

to their places of origin.[10] The Office also provided information to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its pre-sessional meeting. Collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights continued, in particular at the level of field operations, in order to enhance complementary action for the monitoring of human rights and for institution-building. The Office also continued to maintain its contacts with human rights working groups, rapporteurs, experts and monitors, as an integral part of its approach to link human rights concerns with the protection of refugees.

31. The Office participated at the commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the Bangkok Principles (concerning the treatment of refugees) which had been adopted by the Asian-African Legal Consultative Committee (AALCC) in 1966. The event was hosted at Manila by the Government of the Philippines and was attended by a large number of States members of AALCC. The Office assisted in facilitating the meeting and in the preparation of various substantive papers for discussion.

CHAPTER III

ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

A. Major trends in assistance

1. General and Special Programmes

32. The activities of UNHCR are divided into the two broad categories of General Programmes (including the Programme Reserve, the Voluntary Repatriation Fund and the Emergency Fund) and Special Programmes. The activities undertaken under both these programme categories are reviewed in a systematic manner by the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme. At each of the four annual sessions of the Standing Committee, an update of developments in a given region is considered. This update covers overall developments in the region, as well as activities at the country level. In reviewing programmes at the country level, attention is given to the implementation of policy priorities established by the Executive Committee in the areas of refugee women, refugee children and the environment.

33. Obligations entered into during 1996 under General Programmes amounted to US$ 423.5 million. With regard to Special Programmes (which include programmes under funding appeals by the Secretary-General), obligations in 1996 reached US$ 720.5 million. Some 36.3 per cent of the Special Programmes pertained to the UNHCR Programme of Humanitarian Assistance in the former Yugoslavia and a further 33.4 per cent to the operation in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Other important expenditures concerned the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees and repatriation programmes in the Horn of Africa and Afghanistan. Thus, total voluntary funds obligations relating to 1996 activities amounted to US$ 1.14 billion, with a total of US$ 212.8 million available at year-end (not including the Working Capital and Guarantee Fund) as carry-over to meet initial programme expenditure in 1997. In addition, expenditure under the regular budget amounted to US$ 25.3 million. Detailed information on expenditure levels for each country or area programme is given in table 1.

34. The initial 1997 General Programmes target approved by the Executive Committee in October 1996 stands at US$ 452.6 million, including US$ 37 million for the Programme Reserve, US$ 20 million for the Voluntary Repatriation Fund and US$ 25 million for the Emergency Fund. Projections for 1997 under Special Programmes currently amount to US$ 737.8 million, of which some US$ 230 million pertain to the operation in the Great Lakes region and some US$ 235.9 million to the former Yugoslavia.

2. Types of assistance

(a) Emergency preparedness, response and assistance

35. In 1996 and the first quarter of 1997, UNHCR actively participated in the follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 of 28 July 1995, on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations. At the same time, UNHCR continued to develop its own emergency preparedness measures. That emergency response capacity was extensively tested in new and continuing emergencies over the past year. The operation in the Great Lakes region of Africa made unprecedented demands on

UNHCR resources, with population movements provoking one emergency after another throughout the year, culminating in the massive repatriation of persons to Rwanda in the last two months of 1996, and the dispersal of several hundred thousand refugees within Zaire from the camps along Zaire's eastern border. There were other significant deployments of emergency staff and resources to Dagestan and Ingushetia, Iraq, Mali, Sierra Leone and Togo.

36. The Emergency Preparedness and Response Section of UNHCR acts as the Office's focal point for both emergency preparedness and response. The Section consists of five Emergency Preparedness and Response Officers and six Emergency Administrative Officers. In responding to an emergency, the Section is complemented by UNHCR field staff drawn from a regularly updated emergency roster. This internal UNHCR standby roster of some 30 staff is supported by external standby arrangements with the Refugee Councils of Norway and Denmark, United Nations Volunteers and Rädda Barnen International (Swedish Save the Children Foundation). Specialist engineering staff are provided through an arrangement with the Red R (Australia) and staff for rapid technical assistance in the health sector can be provided through the Centers for Disease Control and for Disease Prevention (United States of America).

37. Emergency preparedness has been strengthened through an increased emphasis on contingency planning. Contingency planning guidelines were finalized in 1996 and have been distributed throughout UNHCR and have been widely shared with key United Nations partners, notably the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as well as with partner non-governmental organizations. The guidelines have become part of the basis for an inter-agency approach to contingency planning. Staff from the Emergency Preparedness and Response Section successfully facilitated a collaborative contingency planning process in Angola, Eritrea, the Central Asian Republics, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

38. An important element in the enhanced emphasis on preparedness has been emergency training. Emergency Management Training Programme (EMTP) workshops were held in Ethiopia (for countries in the Horn of Africa and East Africa), Kyrgyzstan (for the Central Asian Republics) and Guinea (for West Africa). The training workshops are aimed at governmental staff, staff of other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, as well as of UNHCR. Two Workshops for Emergency Managers (WEM) were held in 1996. These Workshops were aimed at the UNHCR staff who comprise the internal UNHCR Emergency Response Team roster.

39. An important new training initiative is the development of a training programme in emergencies for UNHCR staff at headquarters. Refugee emergencies not only affect staff in the field, but they also require an extraordinary response at headquarters. In recognition of this, work has started on the design of a course which will be implemented in 1997. Together with the EMTP and the WEM training courses, this headquarters training will complete an emergency training programme which covers all key actors in an emergency response.

40. In 1996, total expenditure on emergency assistance amounted to US$ 77.6 million, of which US$ 22 million was under General Programmes and US$ 55.6 million under Special Programmes.

(b) Care and maintenance

41. After the emergency phase of a refugee operation, the basic needs of a refugee population are covered by activities described as care and maintenance until such time as a durable solution is found. During 1996, well over one half of UNHCR General Programmes expenditure was in the form of care and maintenance assistance. This amounted to some US$ 243.2 million, with an additional US$ 400 million expended for care and maintenance assistance under Special Programmes.

42. In Africa, where the greatest percentage of care and maintenance programmes are implemented, sizeable programmes continued in Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, the Great Lakes region, Guinea, Kenya and the Sudan.

43. Elsewhere in the world, care and maintenance assistance continued to be provided in South-East Asia to the remaining Vietnamese populations in the South-East Asian camps and Hong Kong, pending their repatriation or resettlement. In addition, major care and maintenance programmes were carried out in Algeria, the Central Asian Republics, Georgia, the Russian Federation and Pakistan during 1996.

(c) Local settlement

44. Assistance for local settlement, where possible, takes the form of projects aimed at promoting the socio-economic self-reliance and local integration of refugees in asylum countries, thus enabling UNHCR to phase out its care and maintenance on a gradual basis. As a durable solution to refugee problems, local settlement schemes in countries of asylum have encountered increasing constraints, such as restrictions in issuing work permits and scarcity of agricultural land, to name only two. In addition, xenophobia and severe unemployment in some host countries have added to the problems refugees face when attempting to find opportunities to become self-reliant and to contribute to the local economy in their countries of asylum.

45. In 1996, total expenditure on local settlement projects amounted to US$ 136.8 million.

(d) Voluntary repatriation

46. Voluntary repatriation continues to be regarded as the preferred durable solution to refugee situations throughout the world. In its deliberations on the follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56, UNHCR reviewed its protection and assistance activities in countries of origin. There is growing recognition that, in order to fulfil its statutory mandate of seeking permanent solutions to the problems of refugees, UNHCR should place its assistance activities in a wider development perspective. In that regard, UNHCR has continued its efforts to build operational linkages to development organizations.

47. To enhance the approach of UNHCR to voluntary repatriation operations, a Reintegration and Self-Reliance Unit has been established. The Unit will provide UNHCR managers responsible for reintegration operations with assistance in the design of programmes for the implementation of such operations, ensuring that lessons are learnt from past reintegration operations.

48. The main operational instrument of UNHCR to promote the reintegration of returning refugees is the use of small-scale, community-based projects, known as

quick impact projects. These are aimed at nurturing the self-reliant, albeit initial, recovery of war-torn societies and communities. The Office has developed a policy and methodological framework for such projects, which should ensure that those aims are met.

49. Another tool for promoting self-reliance among refugees reintegrating in their country of origin and, where appropriate, also to promote local settlement, are micro-finance schemes. A manual on employment and micro-finance assistance has been prepared and is currently being tested in the field. Efforts within UNHCR are presently being undertaken to assess the appropriateness of micro-finance schemes as a tool for supporting self-reliance in refugee and returnee situations. Under this recently adopted approach, new initiatives are currently being prepared by UNHCR in Afghanistan, Georgia, Tajikistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

50. During 1996, US$ 196 million was spent on voluntary repatriation.

(e) Resettlement

51. In 1996, some 35,800 refugees were resettled with UNHCR assistance, including 925 women at risk and 560 medical cases. According to UNHCR field offices, as at 31 December 1996 another 7,200 cases (representing 20,300 persons) were submitted and were awaiting decisions from resettlement countries. A further 4,500 cases (of more than 11,000 persons) were to be submitted or re-submitted in 1997 by UNHCR for resettlement. The total figure for 1996 represents a small decrease from the end-1995 figure of 36,077 refugees who departed for resettlement or who were, as at 31 December 1995, accepted and awaiting travel arrangements. These figures do not include many other persons of concern to UNHCR who are admitted as refugees in third countries under specific resettlement and family reunification programmes, often with the active support of partner non-governmental organizations.

52. In its consideration of resettlement issues, the Executive Committee, at its forty-seventh session, welcomed issuance in June 1996 of the Resettlement Handbook, a user-friendly reference to standards, procedures and priorities for UNHCR and resettlement countries. The Executive Committee also encouraged the regular exchange of information as part of ongoing consultations.

53. The Working Group on Resettlement, comprised of Governments, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), met five times in 1996 and, most recently, in January 1997. In June 1996, UNHCR convened the Formal Consultation on Resettlement with the participation of non-governmental organizations. Three tripartite consultations were also organized at the regional level at Toronto (Canada), Canberra and Stockholm. The Working Group was a key element in the follow-up by UNHCR to the Nordic proposal to initiate a two-year pilot project to diversify resettlement opportunities and to improve implementation.

54. In January 1997, UNHCR endorsed a strategy for the improved management of resettlement processes, in accordance with the Delphi Plan of Action (see paras. 75-79 below). The main components of the strategy are: joint reviews of resettlement needs by the Resettlement Section and the Operations Unit; designation in a situation, where needed, of an officer responsible for resettlement functions, with appropriate reporting relationships and responsibilities; a new and intensive training programme for resettlement staff in the field; a streamlined submissions process, equipped with a database and other in-process monitoring features; and an effective information exchange process among all partners in resettlement.

B. Programme themes and priorities

1. Refugee women

55. The Office continues to follow up the relevant strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action by integrating activities based on those objectives into the delivery of its multisectoral programmes for refugee women. The strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action of particular concern to UNHCR include the means of addressing the problems of violence against women, women and armed conflict, and the human rights of women. Its work in these areas takes into account the various United Nations instruments and the principles set out therein, and the strategies of the Platform for Action. After the Beijing Conference, UNHCR set up a Reference Group for Refugee Women to advise and assist the High Commissioner in the implementation of the UNHCR policy and guidelines on refugee women, identifying obstacles to their implementation and recommending solutions.

56. A major effort to integrate the concerns and needs of refugee women into all protection and assistance programmes is under way, both through the progressive institutionalization of training at the field level in people-oriented planning, and through the work of four recently appointed Regional Advisers on Refugee Women.

57. In September 1996, activities commenced under the Bosnian Women's Initiative, which was proposed and initially funded by the Government of the United States of America. The objective of the Initiative is to promote activities which empower Bosnian women and provide opportunities for their self-reliance and self-sufficiency. This initiative embraces both returnee refugee and displaced women, enabling them to rebuild their lives and contribute to the long-term reconstruction and democratization of their communities and country. A similar initiative for Rwanda has been initiated by the High Commissioner. It is aimed at the economic empowerment of women in Rwanda, thereby strengthening the social structure of the post-genocide society and facilitating the process of reconciliation and reintegration in the country.

2. Refugee children

58. The Office has embarked on a comprehensive plan of follow-up to the report on the impact of armed conflict on children.[3] This will involve support for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, and the preparation of a first year work plan with UNICEF, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other organizations.

59. In February 1997, UNHCR launched a worldwide evaluation of its programmes for refugee children and adolescents. The results of this evaluation will help in the development of a rights-based, goal-oriented agenda for refugee children and adolescents.

60. Based on the success of the regional approach to refugee children's issues adopted in the Great Lakes region of Africa during the emergency in Rwanda and Burundi, plans are under way to deploy senior advisers for child and adolescent welfare to other regions. Additional expertise in the rights of children, peace education, conflict resolution, and community support for children, adolescents and families is also being mobilized.

61. The Office is committed to ensuring that the Convention on the Rights of the Child[11] becomes the normative frame of reference for all of its relief and reintegration operations. It has, therefore, begun developing, in partnership with the International Save the Children Alliance and in close cooperation with UNICEF, a capacity-building programme for UNHCR, non-governmental organizations and other implementing partners, based on the principles set forth in the Convention.

62. The Office is planning to establish a trust fund for refugee children and adolescents to support capacity-building, to pilot innovative projects, and to develop an educational programme for conflict resolution, peace education and the promotion of children's rights. The trust fund will be additional to regular programming for children, adolescents and families.

3. Environment

63. Pursuant to the adoption of a reformulated policy on the environment by the Executive Committee at its forty-sixth session in 1995, UNHCR published Environmental Guidelines in June 1996. The guidelines identify a number of measures applicable to all phases of the Office's environmental operations, as well as environmental measures specific to refugee assistance operations, for instance, in phases of emergency, care and maintenance, and durable solutions. The guidelines also elaborate various environmental measures in relation to UNHCR activities, including: consideration of the carrying capacity of the local environment and the protection of environmentally sensitive areas in site selection and camp planning; promotion of energy-saving stoves, energy-saving cooking methods; economic and educational programmes designed to reduce firewood collection; and controlled firewood harvesting.

64. In accordance with the policy set out in the guidelines, a number of projects and activities have been implemented in the field and at headquarters. Progress has been made incorporating environmental considerations into related sectoral guidelines. In addition, a geographical information system (GIS) environmental database is being developed, and testing of other appropriate environmental technologies is under way. A major project was initiated in December 1996 to develop training materials for UNHCR and partner organizations, with the aim of promoting sound environmental practices in areas affected by refugees. Particular attention has been given to promoting the implementation of the guidelines in the field. In the Great Lakes region of Africa, comprehensive measures taken with partner organizations include the establishment of tree nurseries and reforestation, the promotion of alternative sources of energy and the provision of firewood. Since the repatriation of refugees at the end of 1996, steps have been taken to address the rehabilitation needs of former refugee host areas. Similar environmental activities have been conducted in other countries, such as Kenya, Nepal and Uganda. In addition, some model projects were introduced, including a project on environmental education in Kenya, and a comprehensive environment and energy planning project in the United Republic of Tanzania.

65. An international symposium held in April 1996 was jointly organized with IOM and the non-governmental organization Refugee Policy Group on environmentally induced population displacements and environmental impact resulting from mass migrations.

66. Considerable effort continues to be made to ensure essentially sound coordination and collaboration with donors and other international organizations.

4. Building linkages with development and financial institutions

67. The Office continues to develop linkages with development and financial institutions, primarily to ensure the sustainability of solutions to refugee problems, especially that of voluntary repatriation. Progress was made in overall collaboration with the World Bank in 1996. During the annual consultations held between UNHCR and the World Bank in December 1996, agreements were reached on the countries to be targeted for enhanced operational cooperation. In conjunction with the Grameen Trust, micro-credit schemes were introduced in Afghanistan. In March 1996, a memorandum of understanding was signed with UNICEF. Newly revised memorandums of understanding with WFP and the World Health Organization (WHO) became effective in March 1997 and a framework for cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was concluded in April 1997.

C. Programme management and implementation

1. General

68. At its forty-sixth session, the Executive Committee requested the High Commissioner to initiate a process of informal technical consultations on the question of overhead costs, in particular costs at headquarters, for implementing partner non-governmental organizations.[12] Four consultative meetings were held between December 1995 and March 1996, which resulted in a proposed modification and clarification of UNHCR's policy on such overhead costs, which was endorsed by the Standing Committee at its meeting in June 1996.[13] The new policy became effective as at 1 July 1996.

69. The question of audit certification of UNHCR implementing partners has also been the subject of considerable attention and concern on the part of the Executive Committee, the Board of External Auditors, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and Internal Audit. Current audit requirements place overwhelming emphasis on post-project completion certification, providing, at best, information which is too late for corrective action. Current proposals call for a standard requirement to provide a set of audited accounts in order to allow UNHCR to assess financial management capacity in advance (i.e., a pre-qualification of implementing partners), combined with a policy of selective interim and post-completion audits.

70. The UNHCR Asset Management System, introduced in 1994, is aimed at increasing the capability of each field office to improve the control of assets purchased by UNHCR for its own use and that of implementing partners. Bar-code readers enable field offices to undertake annual physical checks of all UNHCR-purchased assets being used by implementing partners, non-governmental organizations and governmental agencies.

71. After the decentralization of training activities during 1995, a large part of the financial assistance provided to implementing partner staff and governmental counterparts for training was covered either under individual country operational projects or those administered by headquarters work units responsible for specific areas of training. With regard to programme management

training in particular, during 1996 UNHCR continued to provide such training to its staff on topics covering the programme management system, needs assessment, project design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, working with implementing partners, and the role of programme and field support staff. In that connection, a programme and project management handbook for UNHCR implementing partners was issued in April 1996. In the latter half of 1996, however, the number of training courses was sharply reduced, pending the introduction of changes in programme management procedures.

2. Evaluation

72. The past year has been a period of development and transition in the evaluation function of the Inspection and Evaluation Service. In view of the limited resources dedicated to that function, other means of reviewing and analysing the various subjects proposed for evaluation have had to be adopted. As a consequence, UNHCR has relied to a much greater extent on the use of outside expertise to carry out evaluations and has delegated many evaluations to the field level and other organizational units. In addition, workshops, such as a workshop on the lessons learned during the UNHCR emergency response in Burundi and Rwanda, have been successfully organized in a manner that allows them to be used as evaluation tools.

73. Using these new approaches, UNHCR has been able to complete a large number of major evaluation studies during 1996 and the beginning of 1997; these include: a review of the UNHCR women victims of violence project in Kenya; an evaluation of the UNHCR repatriation operation to Mozambique; reviews of reintegration efforts in Mozambique, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Afghanistan; a review of the capacity-building efforts of UNHCR in Central and Eastern Europe; a review of the phase-out strategies of UNHCR in selected countries of origin; a review of staff security and stress; a review of UNHCR implementing arrangements and implementing partner selection procedures; a review of the education policy of UNHCR; and a review of the lessons learned in the provision of security in refugee camps.

74. During 1996, inspection missions were also carried out in 22 countries in Africa, Asia and Europe. Subsequent follow-up to those missions was actively pursued after their findings and recommendations were presented to the High Commissioner.

3. Project Delphi

75. At the forty-sixth session of the Executive Committee in October 1995, the High Commissioner made a commitment to restructure the way in which UNHCR worked, so as to improve the delivery, accountability and performance of the Office. This process of institutional reform was named "Project Delphi" and was formally launched in a directive issued by the High Commissioner to all staff on 4 December 1995.

76. Under phase I of Project Delphi (December 1995-May 1996) a broad conceptual framework for change was developed. This process was led by the Change Management Group, comprised of UNHCR staff with field and headquarters experience. Three focus groups, concentrating on three broad areas of UNHCR management processes (operations, people and money) were formed to assist the Group in its work. All UNHCR offices in the field, as well as staff at headquarters, were invited to help in identifying the areas requiring change

through a structure of small groups known as "Delphi cells". The Group presented its report to the High Commissioner and to the UNHCR Senior Management Committee on 1 May 1996, which endorsed it. Its main recommendations, which became the overarching principles of Project Delphi, were as follows: adopting a situational rather than country-based approach to operations planning and management, focusing on all aspects of a refugee problem; maintaining a focus on achieving a durable solution to a problem; better integration of UNHCR protection and assistance activities; moving operational decision-making closer to the point of delivery; enhancing implementing arrangements; and emphasis on effective monitoring, self-evaluation and control.

77. Phase II (June-October 1996) of Project Delphi was dedicated to action planning. The High Commissioner established a temporary planning group under the direction of the Deputy High Commissioner to turn the conceptual framework for change developed by the Change Management Group into a plan of action. Temporary working groups led by senior management were also created to examine and formulate recommendations in three broad categories: core processes; structure and internal communications; and support functions. The Plan of Action, which outlined the proposed broad directions for change in the various sectors of UNHCR activity, was presented to the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee on 2 October 1996. The Standing Committee welcomed the Plan and endorsed its broad directions.

78. Project Delphi has now entered phase III, the implementation phase, expected to be largely completed by the end of 1998. The Plan of Action has been transformed into a detailed implementation plan listing what actions will be taken and by whom to achieve the objectives set out int he Plan of Action, the expected time-frame required to carry them out, the desired output and the resource implications. This will be presented to the Standing Committee at its session to be held on 30 April 1997. The components of the implementation plan are: strategic and global policy; operations management system; operations (policy and management); protection support; operational support; financial services; human resources management; information and communications systems; training; internal oversight; internal communications and record management; and other management issues.

79. The shift in focus from headquarters to the field envisaged under Project Delphi is expected to result in a significant reduction in resource requirements for headquarters during the period of 1997-1998, as the project is implemented.

D. Regional developments in Africa

1. West Africa

80. As a result of a peace accord concluded on 30 November 1996 between the newly elected civilian Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), prospects for the voluntary repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees in the subregion have significantly increased. In late December 1996, the Government of Sierra Leone requested UNHCR to assist in the repatriation of approximately 380,000 Sierra Leonean refugees, of whom 250,000 had sought asylum in Guinea, 120,000 in Liberia, 4,000 in Gambia and 6,000 elsewhere. In response, UNHCR fielded an assessment mission to Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia in January 1997.

81. The mission witnessed spontaneous movements of both Sierra Leonean internally displaced persons and refugees back to their homes and concluded,

inter alia, that the security situation in most parts of the country had improved. Significantly, an overwhelming majority of Sierra Leonean refugees in neighbouring countries expressed a willingness to return home.

82. In February 1997, UNHCR commenced a pilot project to repatriate Sierra Leonean refugees from Monrovia. As at 2 March 1997, a total of 1,317 Sierra Leonean refugees had returned home under that project. Preparatory activities have commenced for a large-scale voluntary repatriation operation. A United Nations consolidated inter-agency appeal on Sierra Leone, including UNHCR funding requirements, was launched in March 1997.

83. In early April 1996, expectations for the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees in the subregion remained unrealized owing to the outbreak of fighting at Monrovia. As a result, thousands of Liberians were forced to flee into neighbouring countries where they faced a growing reluctance to grant asylum following incursions of fighters from the Liberian warring factions. Furthermore, the insecurity prevailing in Liberia has adversely affected UNHCR activities, to the extent that regular access was limited to only 30,000 of an estimated population of 120,000 Sierra Leonean refugees.

84. Since April 1996, the international community, under the leadership of the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS), has endeavoured to put the Liberian peace process back on track. During the Summit held at Abuja, Nigeria, in August 1996, those efforts culminated in the endorsement of the revised timetable of the implementation of the peace process which would lead to elections on 30 May 1997. In accordance with the revised timetable, the disarmament and demobilization phase was undertaken and successfully completed according to schedule. The voluntary repatriation of some 768,000 Liberian refugees in the subregion, however, which was scheduled to take place between 22 November 1996 and 31 January 1997, did not materialize owing to the absence of basic security conditions in areas of return.

85. Pursuant to the above-mentioned developments, and in an effort to advance the final stage of the peace process in Liberia, the Ministerial Meeting of the ECOWAS Committee of Nine on Liberia held in February 1997, concluded that Liberian refugees would be allowed to register and vote only after they had returned to Liberia. The Office has, therefore, continued to maintain a proactive approach to the situation and has initiated a series of actions to facilitate the repatriation of those refugees willing to return to Liberia before the elections.

86. During the period under review, food assistance to Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea has gradually been shifted from general distribution to targeted feeding. On the basis of socio-economic surveys, which were conducted in both countries, UNHCR reinforced income-generating and agricultural activities in order to improve the living conditions of rural refugees pending their return home. In an effort to mitigate the degradation of the environment resulting from the presence of refugees in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, a four-year environmental rehabilitation programme for areas affected by refugees has been initiated by UNHCR in 1997.

87. For the past two years, peace and security have gradually been restored in northern Mali and the rate of return of Malian refugees has significantly increased. After the voluntary repatriation of some 80,000 Malian refugees in 1995 and 1996, the number of refugees in neighbouring countries decreased from 150,000 to 70,000. After having reinforced its presence in northern Mali and implemented a repatriation and rehabilitation pilot scheme in 1995, UNHCR

commenced with broader reintegration activities in 1996, focusing on the rehabilitation of basic services (water, health and education). A programme launched in 1996 to support income-generating activities for women is under way and the results so far have been very encouraging.

88. Despite the implementation of a reintegration programme in Mauritania in favour of local populations and refugees returning spontaneously from Senegal and Mali, the number of refugees in Senegal and Mali remained at 60,000 and 15,000 respectively.

89. After the normalization of the political situation in Togo in the course of 1995, a significant number of Togolese refugees are reported to have returned from Ghana and Benin, reducing this caseload from 300,000 to less than 15,000 in the two countries. The majority of the returnees went back to Lomé where a reintegration programme targeting the rehabilitation of communal infrastructures, such as schools and health centres, has been implemented.

90. Given the high number of refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees in West Africa, steps have been taken to seek closer operational cooperation between UNHCR and ECOWAS. It is hoped that this approach will help foster durable solutions to forced population displacement in the region.

2. Central Africa

91. There are 28,000 Sudanese refugees in the Central African Republic and 96,500 in north-eastern Zaire who have, for the most part, achieved self-sufficiency. Only new arrivals and vulnerable groups are receiving food assistance. Their number is estimated at some 15,400 in Zaire and 3,000 in the Central African Republic. In the Central African Republic, a recent expert study concluded that total food self-sufficiency would depend on the dissolution of the over-populated camp of Mboki and the resettlement of the refugees on more fertile agricultural land around the existing settlement.

3. East Africa and the Horn of Africa

92. A census carried out in the camps in eastern Sudan during March 1996 indicated a reduction of over 50 per cent in the population of Eritrean refugees, which currently stands at 132,907. Rising tension between Sudan and Eritrea, as well as differences of approach between the two Governments, continued to stall the prospects of repatriation throughout 1996. After intensive high-level negotiations, both Governments have recently confirmed their readiness to resume the organized voluntary repatriation of Eritrean refugees from the Sudan, on the basis of bilateral arrangements with UNHCR.

93. The census also determined the remaining number of Ethiopian refugees in the camps. Some 27,000 refugees were repatriated between 15 December 1995 and mid-1996, before the onset of the rainy season. The repatriation of some 23,000 remaining in exile should be completed by the end of 1997.

94. In 1992, Kenya was hosting a refugee population exceeding 400,000 in 11 settlements. By the end of 1996, the UNHCR-assisted refugee population in Kenya had been reduced to 169,813. Of those refugees, 131,278 were Somalis, 33,438 were Sudanese and 4,533 were Ethiopian. The refugees benefit from care and maintenance programmes aimed at maintaining their basic health, education

and nutritional status. Measures are also being taken to promote self-sufficiency and rehabilitation of the environment in areas affected by refugees.

95. The UNHCR Branch Office in Kenya has also been actively promoting the voluntary repatriation of refugees from that country. Between 1992 and 1996, some 231,829 refugees were assisted to return to their home areas. Of those returnees, 154,872 were Somalis, 61,184 were Ethiopians and 15,773 were of other nationalities.

96. The Cross Border Operation, which has been in place since 1992, is aimed at stabilizing population movements inside Somalia and creating conditions conducive to the return of Somali refugees to their home areas. Since its inception, the Operation has been focused on the Geddo and Lower Juba valley regions, from where the majority of the Somalis in Kenya originated. Owing to the unsettled political situation in Somalia, however, the focus of activities since 1995 has shifted towards pursuing rehabilitation activities in some parts of Somalia that are considered safe for the return of refugees.

97. In Uganda, the Government's continued generous policy of land allocation to refugees has enabled the establishment of local settlements. It should be noted, however, that integration programmes have been adversely affected by deteriorating security conditions in the northern part of the country. The ongoing conflict in southern Sudan has resulted in an increase in the population of Sudanese refugees in Uganda from 210,000 to 226,000 since the end of 1995. The deteriorating situation in the Great Lakes region has resulted in an additional influx of Zairian and Rwandan refugees into Uganda, where numbers rose, respectively, from 12,000 to 27,300 and from 6,800 to 16,200 over the period under review.

98. A summit meeting, held at the end of November 1996, of the States comprising the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), endorsed a programme aimed at greater regional cooperation in the Horn of Africa and East Africa. Amongst the priority activities identified are issues of conflict prevention and management, and humanitarian activities, including the repatriation and sustainable reintegration of returnees. This focus and direction by a prominent regional organization promises significant developments in the facilitation of repatriation operations, and in the area of prevention and mitigation of future conditions that might provoke the displacement of people in the region. The Office is in regular contact with IGAD and plans to extend and broaden its cooperation with the organization.

4. Great Lakes region

99. The activities of UNHCR in the Great Lakes region during 1996 were broadly characterized by: the continued promotion of voluntary repatriation as the only durable solution for refugees in Burundi (until July), Zaire (until November) and the United Republic of Tanzania (until mid-December); the provision of essential care and maintenance assistance in the refugee camps until the commencement of the massive repatriation of Rwandan refugees; the return of almost one and a half million Rwandan refugees from Zaire and the United Republic of Tanzania to their home communes in a period of less than two months; and the ongoing attempts to identify and assist the remaining refugees in eastern Zaire on both sides of the confrontation line.

100. The Office began its 1996 activities in the Great Lakes region on the expectation that the repatriation of the estimated total refugee population of

over 1.8 million would increase. Initiatives, such as the second follow-up meeting of the Bujumbura Conference held at Addis Ababa on 29 February 1995, focused on the obstacles to repatriation and sought to resolve the impasse on voluntary repatriation. To break the status quo, UNHCR also formulated a set of proposals to facilitate all possible means for the early and safe return of Rwandan refugees from the countries of asylum. In the same spirit, UNHCR officially excluded from its mandate all those Rwandans who had been indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Despite those efforts, large-scale returns did not occur prior to the repatriation of all Rwandan refugees from Burundi in July 1996, the massive repatriation of some 726,000 Rwandan refugees from Zaire in November and December 1996, and the massive repatriation from the United Republic of Tanzania of over 500,000 Rwandan refugees in December 1996 and January 1997.

(a) Rwanda

101. During the massive repatriation of some 720,900 Rwandan refugees from North Kivu in November and December 1996, UNHCR worked to ensure the viability of humanitarian corridors from entry points to returnee communes of origin. Close cooperation with the Rwandan authorities permitted entry procedures to be accelerated. Despite the scale and speed of this movement, which was in addition to the return of over 500,000 Rwandan refugees from the United Republic of Tanzania in December 1996, UNHCR, together with other humanitarian agencies, was able to make arrangements to receive them. During the mass return through Gisenyi in November, over 10,000 children were separated from their parents. The Office, together with other actors concerned, managed to reunite more than half of them with their families within 24 hours.

102. In response to the massive return, UNHCR immediately deployed additional staff to cover adequately all aspects of the reception and reintegration of the returnees. Additional returnee monitors were also deployed to expand activities in communes of origin, enhancing the capacity of Rwandan institutions to support the reintegration process.

103. As a result of the above-mentioned events, there was a radical expansion of activities in the UNHCR assistance programme in Rwanda, as well as a shift in emphasis towards reintegration, and rehabilitation activities. The Office intends to ensure the sustainability of the returnee absorption capacity at all levels (i.e., central Government, prefectural and communal) and to provide an adequate response to the needs of returnees in areas in which they resettle. To that end, assistance will encompass whole communities and be aimed at bridging the gap between emergency and development assistance.

104. The Office will also continue to carry out its monitoring function during the course of 1997 in order to ensure that returnees are not subject to discrimination and are accorded basic rights. Special efforts will be made to assist women with respect to their property rights, special shelter needs and legal assistance. The Office will also strengthen the capacities of the central and local authorities by financing institutional support and capacity-building programmes.

(b) Zaire

105. The deterioration in the security situation in eastern Zaire throughout 1996 and, in particular, the rapidly deteriorating security situation in and around Bukavu, compelled all United Nations international staff and non-governmental organizations to vacate Bukavu on 25 October.

106. On 15 November 1996, fighting at Mugunga camp between the insurgents and the ex-Forces armées rwandaises (FAR) prompted the refugees to leave, and most returned to Rwanda. By the end of December 1996, 720,900 had arrived in Rwanda, with more than half a million having returned during the first four days of the movement.

107. The remaining refugees from the former Kivu camps dispersed and marched westward towards Kisangani. Some 220,000 of them were later located at Tingi Tingi, Amisis and Shabunda camps. An office established by UNHCR at Kisangani began an emergency assistance programme to promote repatriation.

108. As a result of the fighting between the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation (ADFL) and Government forces at Kisangani, some 150,000 refugees from Tingi Tingi, Amisis and Shabunda fled to Ubundu, on the east bank of the Zaire river. At the time of reporting, UNHCR continued to face serious problems in gaining access to refugees in Ubundu and elsewhere in the area. An elaborate repatriation plan has been set up and is in the process of being implemented. The plan calls for a network of way stations and transit centres to be set up along major repatriation routes with the aim of drawing groups of refugees who have been in hiding or living among local populations out of the forest and local villages. The plan is aimed at encouraging the refugees to receive emergency and repatriation assistance. A humanitarian rehabilitation programme is under way in areas where the former existence of refugee camps had a significant negative impact on the local economy and social infrastructure. The Office is working with local non-governmental organizations and other United Nations agencies on the implementation of that programme.

(c) United Republic of Tanzania

109. The major objective of UNHCR during 1996 remained the active promotion of voluntary repatriation, in accordance with decisions taken at a number of tripartite commission meetings held between the Governments of the United Republic of Tanzania and Rwanda, and UNHCR. Despite those efforts, a limited number of Rwandan refugees chose to return during most of 1996. Encouraged, however, by the massive repatriation from Zaire, the authorities from the United Republic of Tanzania announced the date of 31 December 1996 as the deadline for the repatriation of all Rwandan refugees. On 14 December, the return movement started with thousands of refugees from Ngara walking back to Rwanda. The mass return from Ngara was followed by a similar movement from Karagwe and, by early January 1997, the vast majority of the Rwandan refugees had returned home from the United Republic of Tanzania. Fifty residual Rwandan refugees have had their cases reviewed by the National Eligibility Committee, and as at 31 March 1997 there were no recognized Rwandan refugees receiving assistance in the western region of the United Republic of Tanzania.

110. The influx of Burundian refugees into Ngara District, which had begun at the end of 1995, continued into 1996. The new arrivals necessitated the establishment of a new camp and the expansion of an existing one. In July 1996, a second influx began, this time into the Kigoma region. Owing to the precarious security situation in Burundi, the Office's main objectives for the Burundian refugees have remained those of ensuring their protection, and the provision of care and maintenance assistance.

111. In November 1996, after the rebel advance in eastern Zaire, Zairian refugees also started to arrive in the Kigoma region at a rate of some 1,000 per day. There are indications that, as security is restored in some parts of

eastern Zaire, the Zairian refugees may choose to return voluntarily, and a repatriation plan has been prepared accordingly.

112. As a result of the above-mentioned events, there are at present some 375,000 Burundian, Rwandan and Zairian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania, 278,000 of whom are from Burundi. Of this group, more than 100,000 arrived in Kigoma during the last two months of 1996 and the first two months of 1997. The remaining 105,000 Burundian refugees in the Ngara region were regrouped into one camp.

(d) Uganda

113. At the outset of the fighting, some 12,000 Zairians living near the border between Zaire and Uganda, as well as some Rwandan refugees, fled and crossed into Uganda. While the Government of Uganda had agreed to allocate land to the new arrivals, only 9,000 of them were transported to a new site. The remainder are believed to have returned to Zaire.

(e) Regional assistance provided in 1996

114. An important element of the UNHCR regional strategy in 1996 was the preparation and continued updating of contingency plans outlining how the Office would cope with new emergencies. The Office maintained a regional emergency stockpile, located at Kampala and at Ngara in the United Republic of Tanzania. Owing to funding shortfalls, however, UNHCR was obligated to release stock for the regular programme, thereby decreasing the contingency stockpile to a level that would only meet the needs of 250,000 persons. For 1997 despite the mass return of refugees in late 1996 and early 1997, there remains a very significant potential for a further crisis, whether in Burundi, Zaire or Rwanda. Therefore, UNHCR has decided to maintain the contingency stockpile strategy, and non-food items to cover the needs of 500,000 persons will be procured and put in place in the coming months.

5. Southern Africa

115. In Angola, slow progress in the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol[14] has hampered the implementation of organized voluntary repatriation. In the absence of concrete confidence-building indicators in Angola, such as the formation of a Government of National Unity and a unified army, UNHCR did not promote or organize voluntary repatriation in 1996. Instead, it focused its attention on strengthening basic facilities in returnee areas and building capacities for the reception of the large number of returnees that are expected to arrive when conditions improve.

116. Notwithstanding the above, a significant number of spontaneous voluntary movements took place in 1996 when some 59,000 Angolan refugees returned home, bringing the number that have returned home since the launching of the UNHCR repatriation operation in June 1995 to more than 74,000. In countries of asylum, primarily Zambia and Zaire, preparatory activities for the eventual organized voluntary repatriation of refugees are well advanced.

117. In February 1997, UNHCR launched an appeal for US$ 38.2 million for the 1997 repatriation operation. The year will be a decisive one for Angola since the mandate for the United Nations Angola Verification Mission expired in March. A Government of National Unity and Reconciliation took office in the same month. It is hoped and envisioned by UNHCR that continued progress in the

reconciliation process will make it possible for over 300,000 Angolan refugees to return during 1997.

118. As a result of the recent conflict in Zaire, an increasing number of refugees have crossed the border into Zambia. The total number of refugees registered by the Government as at 15 February was 3,400. The majority of the refugees arrived by boat at Mpulungu, the main port in Zambia on Lake Tanganyika. Preliminary surveys indicate that the arrivals represent a mixture of refugees and displaced Zairians in transit to other locations in Lumumbashi. A small number of Rwandans and Burundians have also arrived. The Office assisted the Government to set up a transit centre at Natende, some 230 kilometres from Mpulungu, which offers better facilities to refugees and relocates them away from the border. The Zambian Red Cross is currently implementing the programme of assistance, which includes feeding and primary health care. As the fighting escalates inside Zaire, UNHCR and the Government are preparing contingency plans and developing local capacities to respond to a large-scale influx of refugees, should it occur.

119. Mid-1996 was marked by the successful conclusion of the repatriation and reintegration programme which benefited more than 1.7 million Mozambican refugees who returned to their home country from six countries of asylum in a period of three years (1993-1996). To make the voluntary repatriation of Mozambican refugees a truly durable solution, UNHCR implemented 1,575 quick impact projects principally in the water, health, transport and educational sectors, in an attempt to assist in the reconstruction of socio-economic structures that had been destroyed by the war. Hence, water supply systems were rehabilitated, health clinics were reconstructed and roads and schools were repaired both for the benefit of the Mozambican returnees and the local population, and in order to foster peaceful coexistence between the two groups. In addition, seeds and agricultural tools were provided to Mozambican returnees so as to enable them to produce adequate food for their domestic consumption. As the UNHCR programme was phased out in June 1996, there was a bumper harvest owing to good rains, large areas were under cultivation and there was continued peace in the country.

120. In Mozambique, UNHCR was also committed to ensuring the smooth transition from humanitarian assistance to sustainable development and, in that connection, it donated a number of non-expendable assets to the Government, to United Nations agencies and to non-governmental organizations in Mozambique which had agreed to continue with UNHCR-initiated projects.

121. It should be noted that, as a result of the sustained peace in Mozambique, UNHCR invoked the cessation clause for Mozambican and Malawian refugees as at 31 December 1996. Hence, Mozambican and Malawian refugees who decided to remain in asylum countries no longer qualify for UNHCR assistance and prima facie protection.

122. In view of the above, as from January 1997, UNHCR will be mainly involved with small numbers of urban refugees in Malawi, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Swaziland and Namibia. In South Africa, however, there are presently over 20,000 asylum-seekers from 55 different countries. The Government of South Africa has established, with training and advice from UNHCR, a refugee determination procedure. So far, some 3,700 asylum-seekers have received refugee status through that procedure. In order to promote the self-reliance of urban refugees, most of whom originate from Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire and Angola, UNHCR is currently focusing on activities which can enable those refugees to achieve self-reliance and thereby avoid becoming dependent on assistance. Based on

recent recommendations by a consultant, appropriate income-generating and vocational training activities will be encouraged. Representatives from UNHCR branch offices will also discuss with the relevant Governments the possibilities for local integration of the urban refugees.

123. In Malawi, given the previous presence of some 1.3 million Mozambican refugees, the environment remains severely damaged. In response, UNHCR played a proactive role and sought funds from donors to regenerate the environment. Several donors responded favourably, which enabled UNHCR to establish a trust fund for the reforestation and rehabilitation of villages that had previously accommodated Mozambican refugees.

124. The Office signed a memorandum of understanding with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on 25 July 1996. The cooperation between UNHCR and SADC will focus, inter alia, on the social, economic and political issues in the southern African region that have a bearing on the root causes of forced population displacement, refugee protection, provision of humanitarian assistance and the search for durable solution.

E. Regional developments in the Americas

125. Two developments have paved the way for definitive solutions for the last major group of Central American refugees remaining in the region after the completion of the process set in train by the International Conference on Refugees in Central America. These are: (a) the successful conclusion of the peace negotiations in Guatemala, culminating with the signing of a peace agreement at the end of December 1996 after 36 years of internal conflict; and (b) the launching of a migratory stabilization plan in respect of Guatemalan refugees in Mexico, pursuant to a public announcement by the Government in August 1996.

126. While developments in Central America and Mexico are encouraging, growing tensions in certain countries of South America, in particular the resurgence of armed military activities, indicate the existence of dangerous, although isolated, pockets of instability which could generate new refugee situations.

127. During the period under review, individual asylum-seekers originating from outside the region have continued to arrive in several Latin American countries, particularly those in South America. This group of asylum-seekers poses challenges for the Governments of the region and for UNHCR in terms of protection, assistance, and the identification and implementation of durable solutions owing to certain problems, such as the lack of personal documentation, and the absence of linguistic and cultural affinities.

128. The Office continued its efforts to incorporate a gender perspective in activities undertaken throughout the region, particularly in Mexico and Central America, with the aim of enhancing the specific contributions of refugee and returnee men and women in formulating and achieving community goals and objectives. Special attention has been paid to Guatemalan refugee and returnee women in order to encourage and enable them to participate in productive projects and community organization, in an attempt to facilitate their integration into society and their recognition as equal partners in their respective communities.

129. Obligations in the region in 1996 totalled US$ 17.9 million. Refugees, returnees and persons of concern to UNHCR in the Americas and the Caribbean at the end of 1996 stood at over 1.5 million. Of that number, only an estimated 47,000 were being assisted as refugees, and some 34,000 as returnees.

1. North America

130. In September 1996, the Government of the United States of America enacted new immigration legislation that restricted access to asylum procedures. The new law provides for the expedited removal of persons seeking admission to the United States who possess false documents or no documents, unless they can demonstrate a credible fear of persecution. Also included are provisions for expanding the list of crimes which can render a person ineligible to apply for asylum, and for establishing a one-year time limit for filing an asylum application. The United States Immigration and Naturalization Service is engaged in developing regulations and procedures to implement the new legislation. The Office has offered extensive comments, both on the new legislation and on the proposed regulations.

131. In November 1996, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration of Canada announced new measures aimed at regularizing the status of some Convention refugees who had been unable to become landed immigrants (permanent residents) in Canada because they lack adequate personal identity documents. Without landed immigrant status, Convention refugees do not enjoy the right of family reunification, are ineligible to receive travel documents and face other difficulties with integration into Canadian society. The adoption of the Undocumented Convention Refugees in Canada will resolve the situation of Somali and Afghan refugees who were recognized as refugees at least five years ago. Convention refugees of other nationalities are not eligible for the procedures.

132. The Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board issued Guidelines on Child Refugee Claimants to respond to the special needs of children appearing before the Board. The guidelines are among the most comprehensive adopted by any country operating a refugee determination system. The guidelines, which took effect on 30 September 1996, apply to all refugee claimants under the age of 18.

2. Central America and Mexico

133. Most UNHCR activities in Mexico and Guatemala continue to be focused on Guatemalan refugees and returnees. Some 30,000 Guatemalan refugees remain in camps and settlements in Mexico in the three southern states of Chiapas, Campeche and Quintana Roo. During the last quarter of 1996 and the first quarter of 1997, considerable progress was achieved in the implementation of the migratory stabilization plan for Guatemalan refugees. Under the plan, Guatemalan refugees in Campeche and Quintana Roo who wish to remain in Mexico are being provided with immigrant documentation and those with Mexican children or spouses have access to accelerated naturalization procedures. In December 1996, the President of Mexico personally handed naturalization papers to 48 former Guatemalan refugees. Several hundred requests have since been filed. By the end of 1996, over 65 per cent of those who had requested an immigrant document were in possession of one, which, after five years, enables holders to apply for permanent residence. Only some 12 per cent of all those applying for documentation did not request immigrant documents. Given the already well-advanced de facto integration of Guatemalan refugees in these two States, UNHCR assistance is currently geared primarily towards upgrading the

infrastructure of basic services in the settlements and resolving the question of land titles. A funding agreement has been entered into between the European Community and the Mexican Commission for Aid to Refugees for a regional development project targeting both Guatemalan refugees and neighbouring Mexican communities in Campeche and Quintana Roo.

134. Refugees in Chiapas (two thirds of the total caseload) have, however, not yet been given the same favourable migratory treatment as those in Campeche and Quintana Roo. They have continued to depend on care and maintenance assistance, principally in the sectors of food, health and education, pending the identification of viable longer-term solutions.

135. During the course of 1996, 4,086 Guatemalan refugees returned to Guatemala, predominantly from Mexico, bringing the total number of returnees as at 1 January 1997 to 34,181 since repatriation movements began in 1984. Of that number, 16,608 returnees have been repatriated on an individual basis and 17,573 have returned collectively since collective movements were initiated in 1993. The number of returnees in 1996 fell short of initial projections and the number of returnees in 1997 is not expected to significantly increase, notwithstanding the signing of the peace agreement. The Office continues to support repatriation movements and initial socio-economic reintegration through community-based quick impact projects. A shift of emphasis in UNHCR activities from previous years is taking place in the light of the provisions of the peace accords between the Government of Guatemala and the Guatemalan Revolutionary Unit, which provide a new framework for coping with uprooted populations, new priorities for Governments and their capacities for absorption, as well as prospects for the increased operational involvement of development agencies and other actors.

136. In the rest of the subregion, with the exception of Belize, the thrust of UNHCR activities has been to act as a catalyst for the promotion of the rights of refugees, returnees and other uprooted populations. Support has been given to strengthening national commitments and capacities to uphold the principles of asylum and international refugee law. Cooperation has been increased with national entities, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, with the overall goal of ensuring that adequate national institutional frameworks and mechanisms are in place so as to guarantee the rights of individual asylum-seekers and to address potential new refugee situations. In that regard, special mention must be made of the signing of letters of understanding between UNHCR and the offices of the Ombudspersons in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. In Belize, a quick impact project is facilitating the local integration of several thousand Central American refugees who have not opted to be repatriated.

137. In October 1996, a regional forum on human rights, refugees and migration in Central America was held at San José. The Forum, convened by the Central American Council of Human Rights Ombudspersons, was jointly organized by UNHCR, the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights, the International Labour Organization (ILO), IOM and UNICEF. The Forum adopted a series of recommendations and a plan of action for the protection of the human rights of uprooted populations in Central America. The Forum called upon UNHCR and other organizations dealing with uprooted populations to provide pertinent technical and financial support to the Central American Council of Human Rights Ombudspersons in order to effectively implement the recommendations.

138. In March 1997, UNHCR participated as an observer, together with IOM, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Economic Commission for Latin

America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in the Second Regional Conference on Migration, hosted by the Government of Panama. The Conference, which gathered representatives from Canada, the United States of America, Mexico, the five Central American States, Belize and Panama, was convened to address the complex phenomenon of migration through a joint and comprehensive approach. The conference adopted a Plan of Action, which, inter alia, recognized the fundamental difference between the protection to be granted to refugees, in conformity with international law, and the rights of migrants.

3. South America and the Caribbean

139. The situation in the Caribbean has remained relatively stable, and continues to be monitored closely. During the period under review, there were signs of growing unrest in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Attempts by Haitian and Cuban groups to reach the United States of America continued, albeit in smaller numbers than in 1994 and 1995. Fifty Haitians were assisted by UNHCR in 1996 to repatriate, principally from the Dominican Republic.

140. In the whole region, there were an estimated 50,900 refugees and persons of concern, of whom only some 7,100 benefited from UNHCR assistance. The trend in arrivals of asylum-seekers, including those from countries outside the region, stabilized, particularly in Brazil. Countries in South America with large internal displacement problems have also generated external flight, albeit in small numbers.

141. The focus of UNHCR activities in the region has been to strengthen the concept of an international protection institutional framework as a key to both prevention and durable solutions. The issuance or improvement of existing refugee legislation has been pursued in that regard. In October 1996, the Government of Chile issued a decree amending the chapter on refugees of the Migration Law dating back to 1975. In Brazil, a refugee bill awaits final approval from the Senate after having been approved by Congress. The Governments of Uruguay and Paraguay are working on draft refugee laws. Taking into account the current trends of economic and political integration, UNHCR has also been actively promoting the coordination of refugee policies and the harmonization of legislation and procedures.

142. The Office attended the Sixth Ibero-American Summit held at Santiago, in November 1996. The theme of the Summit was governance for an efficient and participative democracy. The Summit was preceded in October 1996 by a Preparatory Meeting on Asylum, held at Montevideo, in which UNHCR participated as an observer. Throughout the meeting, the interventions of UNHCR were actively solicited in the discussions on several agenda items which concerned principles of international protection and on UNHCR activities in Latin America. The Final Declaration of the Conference recognized the importance of refuge as a universal institution, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

F. Regional developments in Asia and the Pacific

1. South Asia

143. Voluntary repatriation from Bangladesh to Myanmar is in its final phase, despite delays resulting mainly from limited clearances. The Myanmar authorities have affirmed a commitment to complete a large-scale movement by the

end of the first quarter of 1997. It is envisaged that not all 20,000 persons remaining in two camps in Bangladesh will return, and discussions between the concerned authorities are under way to ensure a durable solution for any residual population. As at mid-March 1997, nearly 230,000 Muslim former residents of Rakhine state had returned.

144. The Office continued to expand and intensify its monitoring coverage of returnees, and Muslim populations in general, in northern Rakhine state. This is in parallel with the implementation of small-scale assistance projects aimed at stabilizing economically vulnerable groups, in particular female-headed households and landless families. The Office has unrestricted access to returnees, including those in detention, and staff are able to travel to all areas where assistance activities are being implemented. The Office has deferred its withdrawal from the area to the end of 1998, by which time it is hoped that more development-oriented mechanisms will be in place to ensure continuity in the stabilization process.

145. Since April 1995, there has not been any voluntary repatriation movements of Sri Lankan Tamils from India owing to the breakdown of peace talks and the resumption of the conflict between the Sri Lankan military and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam. In January 1996, a field office was opened in Kilinochchi, facilitating the presence of UNHCR in an area where a significant number of internally displaced persons were located. In mid-1996, the conflict further escalated, leading to the evacuation of UNHCR staff from Kilinochchi to Mallavi in the Vanni region. During 1996, over 6,000 earlier returnees from India as well as nearly 15,000 internally displaced persons were provided with shelter and relief assistance in the open relief centres and transit centres, and some 150,000 to 200,000 internally displaced persons, including earlier returnees from India, benefited from community-based micro-projects funded by UNHCR. Towards the end of February 1997, some 18,000 newly displaced persons arrived in the open relief centre at Madhu and the affiliated open relief centre at Palampiddy, and over 7,600 persons had arrived at Tamil Nadu, India, since mid-1996. They are accommodated in existing government-administered camps.

146. Within the framework of promoting self-reliance, the rationalization of the assistance programme for over 20,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in India (mostly Afghans) resulted in the reduction of the assisted caseload to a little over 10,000 persons by the end of 1996; a further reduction in some 8,000 beneficiaries is envisaged within the first quarter of 1997. Recent developments in Afghanistan have led to a trickle of new arrivals in New Delhi. In other developments during the period under review, UNHCR expanded its refugee law promotion and dissemination activities in India, involving various governmental bodies, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations.

147. There have been no significant developments as regards the situation of some 91,000 Bhutanese refugees and asylum-seekers in Nepal. At the seventh round of bilateral talks between Bhutan and Nepal in April 1996, the two Governments agreed to continue consultations. The Office has reiterated its readiness to support the implementation of measures that might be mutually agreed upon by the two Governments to achieve durable solutions for this population. During the last quarter of 1996, a number of demonstrations and marches were organized by refugee organizations to solicit support for their return to Bhutan.

2. East Asia and the Pacific

148. The seventh and final meeting of the Steering Committee of the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees, held at Geneva on 5 and 6 March 1996, reviewed the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees[1] since its adoption in 1989. It noted with satisfaction that the objectives of the Plan of Action had been successfully met. Clandestine departures from countries of origin had virtually ceased, the principle of asylum had been preserved, and effective screening procedures had been introduced in countries of first asylum, thus facilitating the resettlement of recognized refugees to third countries and the repatriation to their country of origin of persons who did not meet the internationally accepted criteria for refugee status. The Steering Committee thus declared the formal completion, as at 30 June 1996, of the Plan of Action in first asylum countries members of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN), noting that solutions for the relatively larger caseload in Hong Kong would take longer.

149. During 1996, 29,217 Vietnamese non-refugees were repatriated to their country of origin. In accordance with the conclusions of the Steering Committee, UNHCR progressively phased out its assistance in ASEAN first asylum camps commensurate with the rate of repatriation, resulting in the closure of camps in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. The Government of the Philippines determined that some 1,600 Vietnamese non-refugees would be permitted to remain, pending future repatriation or other solutions. The Government of Thailand closed its camp for Vietnamese non-refugees in February 1997. As at 1 March 1997, a total of 755,315 Vietnamese refugees had been resettled in third countries since 1975 and over 106,000 Vietnamese non-refugees had been repatriated to their county of origin under the Comprehensive Plan of Action, leaving a much reduced post-Plan caseload of 4,149 non-refugees in Hong Kong and some 160 others in other locations, who had been rejected on the basis of nationality. As at 1 March 1997, 1,432 prima facie Vietnamese refugees who had arrived prior to the completion of the Plan remained in the region, of whom 1,345 were in Hong Kong. The Office has renewed its request for third countries to provide resettlement opportunities for the last of the Vietnamese refugees for whom a durable solution is still to be found.

150. During 1996, UNHCR continued to provide repatriation grants for non-refugees who were voluntarily repatriated to Viet Nam. It also supported micro-projects to benefit returnee communities, which included infrastructural improvements to schools, dispensaries and bridges and the construction of roads. The Office also continued to monitor the well-being of returnees.

151. As at 1 March 1997, 27,310 Lao had returned voluntarily to their country of origin since 1981. Some 260 Lao were repatriated during 1996, of whom 235 returned from China. Although voluntary repatriation from Thailand to the Lao People's Democratic Republic came to a virtual halt during 1996, nearly 3,000 Lao were accepted for resettlement. Consequently, the number remaining at Ban Napho camp for whom durable solutions were yet to be found was significantly reduced to some 1,500 individuals. In February 1997, the Government of Thailand announced its intention to close Ban Napho camp by 30 June 1997 and, at a tripartite technical meeting held in March 1997, the Governments of Thailand and the Lao People's Democratic Republic announced their intention to achieve solutions for the residual Ban Napho population by that date.

152. During 1997, UNHCR will continue to provide repatriation grants to Lao returnees and assist in their integration within existing villages and rural

resettlement sites. Particular attention will be given to vulnerable returnees, including the drug dependent, older persons and female-headed households.

153. During 1996, a total of 426 Cambodians were repatriated to their country of origin, mainly from Indonesia, with UNHCR assistance. The Office phased out its assistance activities for Cambodian returnees during 1996 and, during 1997, will focus on the advocacy and promotion of refugee law, and assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees. The UNHCR Office at Phnom Penh was made a Liaison Office for the UNHCR Regional Office at Bangkok from January 1997.

154. The Chinese authorities have advised that up to 15,000 of the 288,000 Indochinese refugees in China wish to be repatriated to Viet Nam. In collaboration with the concerned Governments, a sample survey of the refugee population has been initiated in order to gauge more definitively the number of refugees who might wish to return to their country of origin. The Office's assistance is focused primarily on the local settlement of these refugees through a revolving credit mechanism aimed at the creation of employment opportunities.

155. At the end of 1996, some 101,000 refugees from Myanmar were residing along the border between Myanmar and Thailand, comprising some 79,000 Karen, 11,000 Mon and nearly 11,000 Karenni. These populations continued to be assisted by the Government of Thailand or the Burmese Border Consortium, which is composed of five non-governmental organizations. Staff from UNHCR at Bangkok have undertaken frequent missions to the border areas in order to monitor the welfare of these populations. The security situation of the Karen deteriorated in early 1997, after an escalation of military action in Myanmar and incursions into camps within Thailand, which resulted in further displacements on both sides of the border and several thousand new arrivals in Thailand. The Office will continue to seek improved security and protection for ethnic minorities from Myanmar in Thailand.

156. In 1996, two major regional initiatives took place, concerning the promotion and dissemination of refugee law in Asia and the Pacific. On 28 and 29 November 1996, the Government of Australia and UNHCR co-hosted a conference on regional approaches to refugees and displaced persons in Asia and the Pacific, which was attended by representatives of 26 countries. The emphasis of the Conference was on the informal sharing of experiences and the identification of trends. It is expected that certain thematic issues of concern to the whole region will be explored at follow-up meetings to be held in the region during 1997. The Commemorative Seminar on Refugees, convened jointly by AALCC and UNHCR at Manila, from 11 to 13 December 1996, was attended by representatives of 22 Governments in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The Seminar focused on the Bangkok Principles, adopted by AALCC in 1966, with a view to their being updated in the light of experience within the concerned regions during the past 30 years. The issues of refugee definition, asylum, solutions and burden-sharing, which were raised at Manila, will be further considered at the next regular session of AALCC, which will be held at Teheran in May 1997.

G. Regional developments in Europe

157. During the period under review, a major focus of UNHCR activities in Europe was the preparation of a regional conference to address the problems of refugees, displaced persons and other categories of persons subjected to involuntary displacement, and returnees in CIS countries and relevant neighbouring States. In Western Europe, a number of countries have reviewed the

status of persons under temporary protection following the signing of the Dayton Agreement. The total number of asylum-seekers in countries of south-western Europe has shown a slight increase. The harmonization by the European Union (EU) of national legislation and policies in Western Europe continues to be closely monitored by UNHCR, and a public position paper on the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference on the Revision of the Maastricht Treaty was issued in November 1996. The close involvement of UNHCR in the legislative processes in Central Europe was a main feature of its activities in the region. A gradual shift from training and institution-building to programmes related to integration was also a feature of UNHCR activities in Central Europe. The signing of a ceasefire agreement in Chechnya (Russian Federation) in August 1996 and political developments in the Caucasus required a continuation of relief assistance and programmes in the region.

1. CIS Conference

158. In the context of regional and comprehensive approaches, UNHCR, in cooperation with IOM and OSCE, convened at Geneva on 30 and 31 May 1996 a conference to address the problem of refugees, displaced persons, other forms of involuntary displacement and returnees in CIS countries and relevant neighbouring States. The Conference sought to address both potential involuntary movements, as well as earlier and ongoing displacements, in the region. The Conference adopted a Programme of Action which sets out practical measures based on a comprehensive approach that takes into account internationally recognized human rights norms and standards. As a result of the discussions at the Conference, UNHCR activities in the region now include assistance to solve the problems of formerly deported peoples and involuntarily relocating persons, both of which were highlighted by the Conference as being groups of concern.

159. National implementation plans for 1997 have been drawn up in the field with the concerned Governments, in which the priorities of CIS Governments and the respective roles of the various actors are indicated. These plans formed the basis for UNHCR and IOM programmes for 1997, which were presented jointly in an appeal for funds in November 1996.

2. Western Europe

160. Since 1992, Western Europe has seen a downward trend in the number of asylum-seekers arriving in the region. Available figures indicate some 250,000 asylum-seekers arrived during 1996, representing an overall decrease of nearly 10 per cent, compared to 1995. The pattern of arrivals in individual countries of the region, however, is not the same in that some countries have had an increase in applications compared to 1995, although most have witnessed a considerable reduction.

161. The process of harmonizing policies relating to asylum and refugees by countries members of EU seems to have lost momentum in 1996, after the position reached by EU in November 1995 on the harmonization of article 1 A of the 1951 Geneva Convention. The Office continues to engage in an informal dialogue on matters pertaining to asylum and refugees and has, in the course of 1996, made contributions to that process in such areas as the treatment of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum and the conditions for the reception of asylum-seekers. The Office considers the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference of the European Union as a forum where a positive outcome might result from the discussions on the

future of the European Union's policy of asylum. The Office has presented its views to member States, as well as to organs of EU.

162. The Office welcomed the ratification by the Governments of Estonia and Lithuania of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol in the first quarter of 1997, manifesting the ongoing work of UNHCR in the Baltic States to create a regime for asylum-seekers and refugees which is based on international standards.

163. While there have been significant return movements from European host countries to Bosnia and Herzegovina, which intensified during the summer months of 1996, they were much lower than initially expected. An important initiative by a number of Western European countries to facilitate the visa-free travel of refugees through those countries was concluded, and has greatly facilitated return movements to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

164. The strategic direction of UNHCR in Western Europe is towards the gradual reduction of programmes and a shift of resources to the Baltic and CIS regions. Priorities in Western Europe will be given to the areas of advocacy, public awareness, training and network building, with a decrease in assistance activities since they are considered the national responsibility of the respective States. Links with institutions in Europe remain a priority for UNHCR, which is reflected in the opening of an office at Strasbourg to strengthen relations with the Council of Europe.

3. Central Europe

165. In Central Europe, UNHCR continued its efforts to influence legislative processes aimed at establishing fair and accessible refugee determination procedures. The Office has endeavoured to assist Governments in institution-building and capacity-building through the provision of training and limited assistance in countries where national structures for procedures for the determination of refugee status are still at a rudimentary stage or need to be further developed. The Office has also continued its efforts to sensitize all States concerned to the importance of comprehensively addressing the issue of integration of refugees in Central Europe. To that end, a series of seminars were organized by UNHCR with parliamentarians and senior government officials.

166. In May 1996, the Parliament of the Czech Republic introduced a new amendment to the existing refugee law, which deleted the provision of the law that limited refugee status to a maximum period of five years, thus allowing recognized refugees to apply for citizenship after a five-year stay in the Czech Republic. The Office also continued to closely monitor developments in legislation related to statelessness, citizenship and nationality in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In May 1996, the Parliament of the Czech Republic approved an amendment to the existing refugee law. Following this amendment, UNHCR, in cooperation with local non-governmental organizations, established a project which is aimed at providing counselling and administrative guidance to individuals in the process of legalizing their Czech citizenship. Over 2,000 persons, mostly children under foster care and detainees, are benefiting from the project.

167. In Romania, the asylum system is firmly established in municipal law, after the law relating to the status and regime of refugees in Romania was promulgated in April 1996 and entered into force in May 1996. The Office has been actively involved in each stage of the development of the new legislation. In similar

developments in Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, UNHCR has been active in offering advice throughout the respective processes to establish national legislation on asylum, aliens and refugees.

168. As a result of the repatriation and resettlement of Bosnians from Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Bulgaria, the number of de facto refugees has been reduced. Nevertheless, the number of asylum-seekers in Poland increased by 2,300 persons during 1996, putting considerable pressure on refugee authorities responsible for the determination of refugee status. Temporary protection status for Bosnians in Austria was extended for another year and redefined to allow the inclusion of some individuals with no legal status. In the Czech Republic, alternative solutions are being offered to those de facto refugees who opt to remain and cannot return to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

169. The lack of affordable housing for asylum-seekers and refugees remains an obstacle to their rapid integration into the socio-economic structure of host countries and tends to encourage movements to Western Europe. In its endeavour to assist Governments in Central Europe, UNHCR has started to sensitize institutions, such as the European Union's Programme to assist the European associate countries in Central Europe and the Council of Europe's Social Development Fund, to the need to address certain aspects of asylum that are beyond the mandate of UNHCR.

4. Eastern Europe

170. In Armenia, the UNHCR assistance programme is aimed at supporting the local settlement of some 150,000 refugees identified by the Government as particularly vulnerable. The assistance provided contributes towards the alleviation of poverty, the enhancement of education and the improvement of conditions, in particular for older persons, women and children. In addition, UNHCR promotes the establishment of legal procedures that allow refugees access to Armenian citizenship, in accordance with the governmental policy of integration.

171. In Azerbaijan, the UNHCR programme addresses the needs of a target group of 150,000 refugees and internally displaced persons identified as vulnerable. In addition, UNHCR cooperates, in an inter-agency framework, with the recently created State Commission for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation of Liberated Areas and will continue providing assistance to returnees in the Fizuli and Agdam regions to help them settle in their areas of origin, to where they have spontaneously returned.

172. In Georgia, UNHCR is assisting a population of some 150,000 internally displaced persons, most of whom originated from Abkhazia and, to a lesser extent, from South Ossetia. A two-pronged approach has been adopted to facilitate the temporary settlement and promote the self-reliance of displaced persons who cannot envisage returning to their areas of origin in the foreseeable future. This approach is also aimed at creating conditions propitious to the return to Abkhazia and to South Ossetia of internally displaced persons and refugees who decide to do so, in close consultation with all concerned authorities. In addition, UNHCR provides support to governmental administrative and legislative bodies to help them deal efficiently with migration and refugee issues.

173. In Belarus, UNHCR has assisted the Government in implementing the existing refugee law and in establishing a reliable and fair procedure for the determination of refugee status. To that end, UNHCR actively promotes capacity-

building within the public administration, as well as with independent actors, such as non-governmental organizations and academic institutions. Assistance is also provided to the Government in order to contribute to the establishment of reception centres which will accommodate, in acceptable conditions, refugees and asylum-seekers pending durable solutions.

174. In 1997, UNHCR plans to open an office at Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, in order to help raise awareness of refugee issues in governmental institutions concerned with migration issues. In addition, UNHCR plans to establish a monitoring system for persons in need of international protection, within the migration transit flux affecting the country, and for assessing the vulnerability of displaced persons from Transdniestr and refugees waiting for a durable solution.

175. After a ceasefire agreement signed in August 1996, presidential elections were held in Chechnya (Russian Federation) in December 1996. After the murder in that month of six international staff members of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), UNHCR assistance activities in the border areas were stopped for security reasons, but continued in the neighbouring areas through local implementing partners and within the limits imposed by the threats against aid workers. A consolidated inter-agency appeal for persons displaced as a result of the emergency situation in Chechnya (Russian Federation) was issued in April 1996 to cover the period 1 January-31 December 1996. Another appeal was issued in February 1997, to cover the period to December 1997, for a beneficiary population of 75,000 displaced persons from Chechnya (Russian Federation).

176. In the framework of the follow-up activities to the implementation of the Programme of Action of the CIS Conference, UNHCR will endeavour to enhance the capacity of the Federal and Regional Migration Service to address the problem of population displacement in the Russian Federation. The Office's assistance will include support to registration procedures and databases, training activities, intergovernmental exchanges and sharing of information, provision of basic material resources and consultancies. Particular attention will be given to the implementation by the federal and regional authorities of efficient and fair procedures for determining the status of asylum-seekers and refugees.

177. Since Turkey maintains the geographical limitation on the application of the 1951 Convention, the determination of refugee status under the mandate of UNHCR remains a main focus of UNHCR activities in the country, particularly for Iranian and Iraqi asylum-seekers. In addition, UNHCR is providing assistance to some 2,500 Bosnian refugees pending their repatriation.

5. Former Yugoslavia

178. The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the annexes thereto,[15] signed in Paris in December 1995, recognized the importance of lasting solutions for more than 2 million refugees and displaced persons and entrusted UNHCR with the task of formulating a plan for a repatriation operation. In 1996 and the first quarter of 1997, UNHCR has, therefore, focused its efforts on the promotion and identification of durable solutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and, by extension, on neighbouring Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Slovenia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

179. At the beginning of 1996, the United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal requested international assistance for refugees and internally displaced persons, who totalled some 3.1 million persons. In the course of that year, it

was estimated that 250,000 refugees and displaced persons returned home to Bosnia and Herzegovina. A further 80,000 civilians, however, were displaced after the transfer of territorial authority. Of a total of 1.2 million refugees who currently remain outside Bosnia and Herzegovina, principally in Western Europe, it is estimated that an additional 200,000 could return in 1997. In addition, up to 50,000 internally displaced persons could return home. Croatia continues to host 160,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and 198,000 internally displaced persons. In Eastern Slavonia, UNHCR is working closely with the Government of Croatia and the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES) to maintain stability and prevent a further outflow of the population. In the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, there are more than 560,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, of whom a sizeable number are expected to require local settlement assistance. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and in Slovenia, there are 5,000 and 14,000 refugees, respectively. In the first quarter of 1997, the UNHCR planning estimate for assistance activities in the region was for some 1.9 million persons.

180. The principal objectives of UNHCR include the facilitation of durable solutions in the context of the next two-year consolidation period which runs until the end of 1998. In addition to repatriation and return, which includes assistance to internally displaced persons, other options include the local settlement of refugees and a limited resettlement programme. Traditional care and maintenance activities will therefore be progressively reduced over the period 1997-1998.

181. The UNHCR programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996 was designed to foster significant early return movements. There were, however, serious political obstacles preventing that, particularly owing to the lack of freedom of movement and security problems, in addition to continuing housing shortages and significant unemployment. Nevertheless, UNHCR strongly emphasized the need for progress in the creation of possibilities for the return of the very large number of refugees and displaced persons who have to return to areas in which they would constitute an ethnic minority. Among the main confidence-building initiatives taken were an increase in the number of inter-entity bus lines, and the promotion of visits of displaced persons to their home towns. While the bus lines have been a success, with around 4,000 persons using them every week by the end of 1996, the visits have, in the majority of cases, met with stiff resistance from the authorities. Several pilot return projects, both in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, have also been continuously obstructed, in spite of prior agreements.

182. Furthermore, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 22 target areas were identified where the infrastructural capacity could be expanded to receive returnees. The largest component of the assistance programme was that of shelter: 17,113 houses, 187 collective centres, 70 schools and 60 medical facilities were renovated in 1996, and 54,000 units received glazing. This programme will be continued in 1997, as will micro-credit management and other activities, including capacity-building and projects to meet the special needs of women, older persons and children.

183. The total 1996 financial obligation for the UNHCR Special Operation (Special Programmes) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including programme delivery and administrative support costs in the region and at UNHCR headquarters, was US$ 261,665,317. The 1996 financial obligation under General Programmes for Slovenia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and a project for refugees of other nationalities in the Federal

Republic of Yugoslavia, including programme delivery and administrative support costs, amounted to US$ 5,016,895.68.

184. At the international level, UNHCR participated in, or organized, a number of meetings and conferences in 1996. Three meetings of the Humanitarian Issues Working Group of the Peace Implementation Council were convened in 1996, the last being held on 16 December 1996. On 20 March 1997, a consultative meeting on planning for repatriation to Bosnia and Herzegovina was convened, followed on 21 March by a Fifth Regional Meeting of Refugee Ministers and Commissioners, with the participation of a number of host and donor States and relevant institutions. At the national level, UNHCR continues to participate in and chair, as appropriate, a number of task forces and working groups in close coordination with the High Representative, the Stabilization Force (SFOR), United Nations agencies, international financial and development institutions, and non-governmental organizations.

H. Regional developments in Central Asia, South-West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East

1. Central and South-West Asia

185. The continuing fighting between factions and the change of authority in various regions of Afghanistan have affected the rate of repatriation of Afghan refugees. In 1996, some 120,000 Afghan refugees were repatriated from Pakistan, while less than 10,000 returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran. The remaining caseload in Pakistan is some 1.2 million persons. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the remaining caseload is approximately 1.4 million persons. The Office carried out its reintegration programme throughout Afghanistan to assist the local communities in receiving returnees in a sustainable manner, mainly in the fields of education, health, drinking water, irrigation, agriculture, the repair of roads and bridges, income-generation and credit.

186. In September 1996, the new authorities in Jalalabad and Kabul imposed regulations abolishing the employment of women and the education of girls. The programmes and rehabilitation activities of UNHCR in those cities have been disrupted, slowed down or cancelled, as have been those of other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. The Office is engaged in a dialogue with the authorities who have promised to ease some regulations and to resume educational programmes for girls.

187. At the end of 1996, fighting north of Kabul created the displacement of some 110,000 persons who took temporary shelter in the capital city. Fighting in the north-west province of Badghis has caused substantial displacement throughout the region, including some 27,000 persons who have been relocated to camps and private accommodations at Herat city. The Office responded to these emergency situations by providing expertise to the local authorities and relief to the displaced persons, in cooperation with other United Nations agencies and ICRC.

188. For its repatriation and reintegration operations in 1997, UNHCR presented a request for US$ 27.1 million during the United Nations consolidated appeal for Afghanistan. The Office has endorsed the conclusions of the International Forum on Assistance to Afghanistan held at Ashgabat, in January 1997.

189. The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to give asylum to the largest refugee population in the world. According to Government figures, approximately 1.4 million Afghan and 500,000 Iraqi refugees remain in the country.

190. The main development in the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1996 was the influx of some 65,000 Iraqi refugees who arrived in the western part of the Islamic Republic of Iran after fighting broke out in the Sulemaniya area of Iraq in September and October 1996. By January 1997, practically all of the refugees had returned to their places or origin. During their stay in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the basic shelter, food and health needs of these refugees were covered by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with UNHCR contributing over US$ 4.2 million from its Emergency Fund.

191. The Office continues to assist the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran through various health, education and income-generating projects that address the needs of the refugees. It has introduced new assistance measures in the education sector to support the efforts of the Government to ensure that primary and secondary education continues to be extended to non-camp documented Afghan refugee children. In 1997, UNHCR is studying the means to extend its support in the sector of education to non-camp Iraqi refugee children. The Office and its governmental partner intend to start a credit scheme project, with the technical assistance of the Grameen Trust.

192. The main development in Pakistan was the arrival of some 50,000 Afghan refugees in the North West Frontier Province after Kabul came under Taliban control. The Office and WFP have directly assisted one third of this group with food, shelter, health care and proper sanitation in Nasir Bagh refugee village. In 1996, UNHCR and its implementing partners have continued to encourage the participation of the refugee community in the organization of and, when possible, payment of services in the water, health care and sanitation sectors. The nutrition surveillance system recommended by a joint WFP and UNHCR food assessment mission will be in operation at the beginning of 1997.

193. The number of Afghan refugees who opt for repatriation to their home country has shown a regular decrease since 1993. Although UNHCR continues to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghans to places in Afghanistan where peace and stability can guarantee a quick and durable reintegration, there is a need to envisage solutions other than repatriation to form part of a comprehensive approach oriented towards solutions.

194. There are UNHCR offices in each of the five Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The overall strategy of UNHCR in Central Asia is to enhance the capacity of Governments in the region to more effectively manage refugee and forced population movements, thereby contributing to the prevention of such population movements in the future. This strategy, and the objectives that follow from it, are entirely consistent and compatible with the Programme of Action adopted by the CIS Conference. In addition, UNHCR is actively engaged in promoting and facilitating voluntary repatriation to Tajikistan and in assisting needy and vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers throughout the region, especially in the areas of health care, income-generation and family support.

195. In October 1996 Kyrgyzstan acceded to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, becoming the second Central Asian republic to do so after Tajikistan. It was also agreed that a Centre for Migration Management would be established at Bishkek to provide training and institutional support to the Migration Department which is responsible for

dealing with refugee matters. In Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, UNHCR provided the Governments with advice and comments on draft legislation related to refugees, and on the establishment of national administrative structures and procedures to manage refugee protection and assistance matters. With UNHCR support, various institutions, such as the Centre for Studies on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law in Uzbekistan and the Institute for Democracy and Human Rights in Turkmenistan, were established to serve as venues for courses, workshops and training in refugee law, international protection and determination of status, as well as to promote the study of, and research and writing on, refugees and other human rights and humanitarian topics. In Tajikistan, the continued deterioration of the security situation in the country throughout 1996 culminated in the two-week hostage crisis in February 1997, in which five members of the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) and four UNHCR staff were held captive along with six others, including a government minister. Unfortunately, in large part owing to the ongoing conflict, only 1,334 refugees were repatriated voluntarily to Tajikistan in 1996. Progress in the inter-Tajik talks in the first quarter of 1997, however, may lead to more conducive political and security conditions in Tajikistan and serve as encouragement for higher levels of voluntary repatriation later in the year.

2. North Africa and the Middle East

196. On the basis proposed by the Secretary-General in his report on the situation in Western Sahara[16] the Security Council, by resolution 1084 (1996) of 27 November 1996, decided to extend the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for a further period of six months, until 31 May 1997.

197. While the work of MINURSO has been suspended after a period of slow progress, UNHCR continues to monitor all developments in the region. It has undertaken to review and update the repatriation plan drawn up in 1991 to prepare for the voluntary repatriation of the refugees, as was foreseen in the United Nations settlement plan for Western Sahara. Updated logistical considerations have set the cost of the UNHCR repatriation plan at almost US$ 50 million. The figure of 105,000 persons in the UNHCR repatriation plan is an initial planning assumption. When conditions permit, UNHCR plans to carry out pre-registration of potential returnees, which is an essential part of the preparatory work for the repatriation operation.

198. Although a survey of water resources has been completed, a planned drilling programme around potential repatriation sites in the eastern part of the Territory has been put on hold in order to avoid a costly initial investment in the absence of a fixed date for the referendum. This postponement does not affect the readiness of UNHCR.

199. The Office has conducted a series of missions to Algeria, Morocco, the Territory of Western Sahara, as well as to the refugee camps in the Tindouf area of Algeria, has held discussions with the relevant authorities, and has received pledges of full cooperation and support form all of its interlocutors. In consultation with MINURSO, UNHCR has also undertaken a number of activities to complement those of MINURSO.

200. The Office is continuing its assistance programmes for the 80,000 vulnerable refugees in the four camps in the Tindouf area, who are among a total

Sahrawi refugee population estimated by the Algerian authorities to number 165,000 persons.

201. The figure of 165,000 persons (105,000 adults and 60,000 children) has been used for statistical purposes in all UNHCR documentation since 1982. Assistance to the 80,000 vulnerable persons (women, children and older persons) is provided on the basis of a joint assessment carried out by UNHCR and WFP in 1987. The figure of 105,000 persons in the UNHCR repatriation plan, referred to in paragraph 197 above, was adopted as an initial planning assumption by a UNHCR technical team which visited the camps in February 1995 to assess the numbers that would need to be repatriated under the United Nations settlement plan. The estimate was based on the number of applications processed at that time by the Identification Commission of MINURSO and multiplied by an average family size of 3.5 persons. The actual figure to be repatriated will need to be revised in the light of further interviews and the real size of individual families.

202. In the course of a mission undertaken to Algeria by the Director of the UNHCR Regional Bureau in June 1996, the question of statistics was discussed with MINURSO at Tindouf, as well as with camp officials, refugees and the Red Crescent. On the basis of those discussions, reports on food distribution and observation at the camp sites, the mission concluded that the figures of 80,000 vulnerable refugees in need of assistance and of 165,000 for statistical purposes did not require modification.

203. Since July 1996, the UNHCR Field Office at Tindouf has become operational, while staff from Algiers and from headquarters regularly conduct missions to the Tindouf area. An international staff member has been appointed to Tindouf, effective 15 February 1997.

204. During 1996, political instability in northern Iraq continued to affect UNHCR programmes and operations. Factional fighting between the two main political parties in northern Iraq, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), coupled with the intervention of outside powers, resulted in population movements both inside Iraq and to the Islamic Republic of Iran. The fighting between KDP and PUK resulted in the flight of an estimated 65,000 PUK supporters from northern Iraq to the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the aftermath of the recapture of the town of Sulemaniya by PUK on 13 October 1996, most of those who had fled to the Islamic Republic of Iran returned to northern Iraq. The Office provided them, initially as refugees and later as returnees, with appropriate assistance to meet their needs.

205. In November 1996, UNHCR decided to construct a transit site at Muqibla (Dohuk Governorate) to stimulate and assist the voluntary repatriation of the Turkish refugees from Atroush camp and from urban areas in the Governorate. Efforts to resolve difficulties created by a group of activists in the camp, who prevented the refugees from freely expressing their will, continued to be a main concern in 1996. In that context, UNHCR announced on 21 December 1996 that it would phase out its assistance to Atroush. As at end-April 1997, some 115 refugees have decided to return voluntarily to Turkey, while 4,311 other persons have left Atroush and are being accommodated in Dohuk Governorate. Another 6,439 persons left the camp and are seeking shelter in the area controlled by the Government of Iraq. The Office is pursuing with the Government of Iraq the question of the entry of the ex-Atroush refugees who wish to be accepted in the government-controlled area.

206. During 1996, UNHCR continued to monitor and assist approximately 200 Palestinians who had been stranded at Salloum on the border between Egypt and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya since September 1995. The immediate needs of vulnerable cases in that population were addressed through the provision of basic relief items. It should be noted that, after the decision of the authorities of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to readmit these persons, UNHCR is closely monitoring the situation.

CHAPTER IV

FINANCING OF MATERIAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

207. In 1996, the final budget of UNHCR was US$ 1.3 billion. Donors provided some US$ 970 million, compared to total contributions of nearly US$ 996 million in 1995. The Governments of the United States of America, Japan, the Netherlands, the Nordic countries and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland maintained their excellent funding levels. The European Commission remained an important contributor to the Office. Donations from both private donors and non-governmental sources continued but at somewhat reduced levels compared to 1995.

208. As in the past, the funding of the 1996 General Programmes remained a top priority. These programmes are core activities for refugees and provide the High Commissioner with the essential flexibility needed to deal with emergencies and voluntary repatriations. In 1996, the upward trend in the funding of General Programmes continued. As at 31 December 1996, the Office had received US$ 351 million towards General Programmes, compared with the previous year's figure of US$ 335 million. Secondary income, in the form of the previous year's carry-over, cancellation of the obligations of prior years, interest earnings and various transfers, allowed UNHCR to carry over some US$ 30 million into 1997. This carry-over helped cover expenditures in early 1997, in advance of confirmation by donors of US$ 200 million announced at the Pledging Conference held in New York in November 1996.

209. In 1996, special operations again amounted to some two thirds of UNHCR operational activities. Appeals were launched, in conjunction with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, for operations in the former Yugoslavia, the Afghan repatriation programme, the emergency in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa, as well as programmes in the Horn of Africa and the Republics of the former Soviet Union. The Office issued its own appeals for Central America, the repatriations to Angola and Myanmar and for a number of other operations. The lack of contributions and the timing of pledges for operations in the Great Lakes region and in the former Yugoslavia were probably the Office's greatest challenges during 1996. These programmes were, at times, short of finances, which hampered operations in the field. During 1996, the Office raised some US$ 618 million for special operations, repatriations and emergencies, in addition to the funds under General Programmes.

210. For 1997, UNHCR faces a sixth consecutive year with projected budgetary requirements well beyond US$ 1.2 billion. A 1997 General Programmes target of US$ 452.6 million has been adopted, the largest ever. For Special Programmes, the Office requires some US$ 740 million. Requirements for operations in the Great Lakes region and the former Yugoslavia, as well as repatriation operations in Africa and Asia, remain urgent priorities, as do programmes in the CIS countries.

CHAPTER V

COORDINATION

A. Follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56

1. Intergovernmental discussions

211. During 1996, the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme devoted a part of each of its meetings to consideration of Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 of 28 July 1995, on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations. In January, the Committee looked at measures undertaken by UNHCR in the field of emergency preparedness and response. In April, it focused on UNHCR operations in countries of origin, including protection considerations, and looked at the need for linkages among relief, rehabilitation and longer-term development. In June, the focus was on UNHCR activities in the field of prevention and capacity-building. A number of overarching issues were considered in September, including the question of coordination.

212. At its forty-seventh session in October 1996, the Executive Committee adopted a wide-ranging conclusion, on the basis of the deliberations of the Standing Committee.[17] In that conclusion, the Executive Committee, inter alia, took stock of the mandate of UNHCR and of the different capacities developed by the Office in emergencies and in achieving solutions, and recognized these as an important contribution to the overall response capacity of the United Nations system. It called upon UNHCR to participate actively in the efforts of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to undertake systematic analysis of various models of coordination, with a view to ascertaining their comparative effectiveness in responding to different situations. It welcomed the conclusion of memorandums of understanding by UNHCR with other organizations of the United Nations system and urged the Office to continue to establish predictable operational relationships through such agreements. With regard to gaps in the response to humanitarian needs, the Executive Committee highlighted the need for a predictable division of labour in respect of internally displaced persons. More generally, with a view to ensuring a coherent response to emergencies, it emphasized the importance of joint contingency planning, needs assessment and monitoring and evaluation. It also stressed that consolidated appeals should reflect priorities established through joint needs assessments, be coordinated with other resource mobilization mechanisms, and take account of the budgetary cycles of agencies and the regional dimensions of crises. The Executive Committee also called upon UNHCR to participate actively in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as the primary mechanism for inter-agency decisions on system-wide policy issues relating to humanitarian assistance, as well as in the elaboration of options and proposals to improve the functioning of the Standing Committee and its working group. Moreover, it called upon UNHCR and the Standing Committee to develop predictable linkages among humanitarian assistance, rehabilitation and development, emphasizing the importance of ensuring the sustainability of reintegration, as well as of withdrawal strategies.

2. Inter-agency process

213. In parallel with the discussions in the Executive Committee, UNHCR has been actively involved in an intensive process of inter-agency consultations on the

follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 within the framework of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and its working group. The Standing Committee was briefed on a regular basis on the progress made in inter-agency discussions, as well as on discussions in other intergovernmental forums, by the Director of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs at Geneva.

214. The Office is of the view that the inter-agency consultations conducted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and its working group on the follow-up to Council resolution 1995/56 have made significant progress in a number of important areas. The Office has, however, expressed its reservations about recommendations made by the Standing Committee in respect of a unitary field coordination model based on the resident coordinator system. The Office has advanced the view that the lead agency model should be retained among the options available to the Secretary-General and the Emergency Relief Coordinator, as a well-tested and flexible formula for ensuring a coordinated response to complex emergencies. In the view of UNHCR, the lead agency approach has the advantage of avoiding multiple layers of coordination, minimizing cost and avoiding diffused accountability. It has the necessary flexibility to cover the cross-border and regional dimensions of complex emergencies, without introducing multi-tiered coordination arrangements which impede, rather than facilitate, the operational effectiveness of the agencies involved.

215. In addition, UNHCR has advanced the view that clearer terms of reference for the Emergency Relief Coordinator, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, as well as for the relationship among them, is an essential element of improved coordination.

B. Cooperation among the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, other members of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations

216. In 1996, UNHCR continued to develop linkages with other members of the United Nations system by concluding or updating global memorandums of understanding (see para. 67 above). A local memorandum of understanding was also concluded with UNDP for Rwanda, defining joint activities in the continuum from humanitarian assistance to development.

217. The Office is actively cooperating with regional and local development institutions throughout the world. In that context, a memorandum of understanding was signed with SADC, which addresses regional humanitarian, social, economic and human rights issues.

218. In 1996 and the first quarter of 1997, over 100 staff members of other United Nations bodies participated in UNHCR training courses, with particular emphasis on people-oriented planning training for gender-sensitive programme planning. Other courses were held on emergency management, food aid, refugee law and protection, determination of status and training on returnee monitoring.

C. Relations with non-governmental organizations

219. The general activities of the Office with non-governmental organizations continued to focus on the Partnership in Action process, the Plan of Action and Recommendations drawn up by non-governmental organizations and UNHCR at Oslo in June 1994, and the promotion of closer cooperation and coordination in all aspects of the work of UNHCR, in order to improve delivery of services to

refugees and other populations of concern to the Office. In late 1996, UNHCR began a review of progress made under the Partnership in Action process in order to assess achievements and to identify outstanding priorities, with particular attention being paid to the relationship with national and indigenous non-governmental organizations.

220. At the CIS Conference held in May 1996, 136 non-governmental organizations were accredited. In the follow-up to the Conference, the involvement of non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the decisions taken by the Conference is a key priority for UNHCR, which has established mechanisms for the enhancement of the involvement of non-governmental organizations at the national, regional and international levels.

221. During 1996, UNHCR concluded 974 subagreements with non-governmental organizations in 128 countries, for operational activities with refugee and other populations of concern to UNHCR. Under those subagreements, 321 national non-governmental organizations implemented 606 projects, and 121 international non-governmental organizations implemented 368 projects.

222. During 1996, over 6,370 staff members of non-governmental organizations throughout the world benefited from training sponsored or conducted by UNHCR. The majority of the training was protection training in Europe, the remainder being protection or refugee law training elsewhere. Other areas covered included training in people-oriented planning, programme management, emergency management and resettlement; various types of technical workshops were also held.

Notes

[1] See Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 12A (A/44/12/Add.1), sect. III.H.

[2] Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

[3] See A/51/306 and Add.1.

[4] See A/AC.96/878, para. 22.

[5] United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, No. 2545.

[6] Ibid., vol. 606, No. 8791.

[7] See A/AC.96/860, para. 20.

[8] United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 360, No. 5158.

[9] Ibid., vol. 989, No. 14458.

[10] See Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 18 (A/51/18), annex VIII.

[11] General Assembly resolution 44/25, annex.

[12] See A/AC.96/860, para. 21 (i).

[13] See A/AC.96/873, annex, decision V.

[14] S/1994/1441, annex.

[15] See Official Records of the Security Council, Fiftieth Year, Supplement for October, November and December 1995, document S/1995/999.

[16] S/1996/193.

[17] See A/AC.96/878, para. 24.

Table 1. UNHCR expenditure in 1996 by regional bureau/country and main types of assistance activities

(All sources of funds)

(Thousands of United States dollars)

Regional bureau/country or area	Type of assistance						
	Emergency assistance	Care and maintenance	Voluntary repatriation[a]	Local settlement	Resettlement	Administrative support	Total
1. Africa[b]							
Angola			13 415.7	150.0		442.7	14 008.4
Benin		1 614.0	1 000.0	49.7		199.7	2 863.4
Burundi	4 356.6	6 204.4	1 025.7	32.5		396.7	12 015.9
Central African Republic		3 275.6	267.6	208.1		51.7	3 803.0
Côte d'Ivoire		8 665.1	20.0	3 461.2		524.0	12 670.3
Djibouti		2 031.5	758.9			305.1	3 095.5
Eritrea		717.2	5 563.7			261.8	6 542.7
Ethiopia		8 283.9	12 717.1	4 005.5		1 125.0	26 131.5
Ghana	1 001.8	2 346.0	2 622.5	63.1		269.7	6 303.1
Guinea		23 280.0	20.0	85.9		467.3	23 853.2
Kenya	556.1	16 695.2	3 206.7	639.2	392.3	2 156.9	23 646.4
Liberia		1 825.7	1 367.2	35.9		241.4	3 470.2
Malawi		2 103.4				84.1	2 187.5
Mozambique		361.5	7 798.3			922.4	9 082.2
Rwanda	16 319.9	642.0	47 696.1			1 010.1	65 668.1
Senegal		1 545.3	161.4	1 738.2		655.8	4 100.7
Sierra Leone	287.0	1 404.3	305.0	61.1		50.4	2 107.8
Somalia (North-West Somalia)		196.0	2 823.1				3 019.1
Sudan		4 796.3	2 931.7	6 235.5	68.6	995.6	15 027.7
Uganda	273.7	3 224.9		23 730.4		665.9	27 894.9
United Republic of Tanzania	16 525.2	37 063.0	5 669.2	218.3		900.3	60 376.0
Zaire	18 001.6	69 800.4	3 885.5	3 456.7		582.6	95 726.8

Regional bureau/country or area	Type of assistance						
	Emergency assistance	Care and maintenance	Voluntary repatriation*	Local settlement	Resettlement	Administrative support	Total
Zambia		1 497.7	1 168.4	534.7		372.6	3 573.4
Zimbabwe		1 001.2				53.9	1 055.1
Southern Africa		2 445.3	1 596.5	613.6		694.9	5 350.3
West Africa		5 773.5	12 023.5	1 619.1	24.0	473.4	19 913.5
Other countries in Africa		18 937.8	762.2	1 074.3		96.6	20 870.9
Subtotal (1)	57 321.9	225 731.2	128 806.0	48 013.0	484.9	14 000.6	474 357.6
2. Asia and Oceania							
Bangladesh		3 654.2	1 113.6			404.2	5 172.0
China	25.0	338.3		2 522.1		189.5	3 074.9
Hong Kong		9 221.4	2 187.0		145.1	401.3	11 934.8
Nepal		5 637.7		529.6		229.3	6 396.6
Philippines		1 006.3	1 237.9		182.5	133.9	2 560.6
Thailand		6 660.1	203.2		242.0	760.0	7 865.3
Viet Nam		1 481.5		11 989.0		176.3	13 646.8
Other countries in Asia		8 567.3	19 045.9	2 579.5		1 933.0	32 125.7
Australia and New Zealand		948.8		34.9		148.6	1 132.3
Subtotal (2)	25.0	37 515.6	23 787.6	17 655.1	569.6	4 376.1	83 929.0
3. Europe							
Armenia		4 279.1		1 357.5		228.2	5 864.8
Austria		684.8		1 248.3		95.7	2 028.8
Azerbaijan				5 912.1		273.5	6 185.6
France			43.0	2 438.6		199.0	2 680.6
Georgia		5 868.0				355.9	6 223.9
Germany		187.0		2 409.3		91.3	2 687.6
Greece		1 870.3				93.8	1 964.1
Hungary		1 883.7		473.9		73.3	2 430.9
Italy		484.7		2 290.3		319.1	3 094.1

Regional bureau/country or area	Type of assistance						Total
	Emergency assistance	Care and maintenance	Voluntary repatriation*	Local settlement	Resettlement	Administrative support	
Russian Federation	4 784.9	8 570.9	171.7			642.8	14 170.3
Spain				1 122.6		167.5	1 290.1
Turkey		4 167.7			459.2	379.4	5 006.3
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland			65.0	1 501.5		102.2	1 668.7
Former Yugoslavia		242 592.7	93.9	3 521.6	765.5	4 844.7	251 818.4
Central countries		3 578.5		1 278.3		191.8	5 048.6
CIS countries		1 996.3				126.0	2 122.3
Northern and Baltic countries		739.4		1 169.2		67.0	1 975.6
Western countries		649.6		3 164.9		189.0	4 003.5
Subtotal (3)	4 784.9	277 552.7	373.6	27 888.1	1 224.7	8 440.2	320 264.2
4. <u>Americas</u>							
Canada				1 006.0		60.8	1 066.8
Guatemala			4 100.0	1 858.3		648.0	6 606.3
Mexico		2 905.9	1 316.7	5 058.2		522.3	9 803.1
United States of America				2 842.0		153.2	2 995.2
Northern South American countries		1 606.3	125.1	542.1		371.0	2 644.5
Central American countries			336.6	3 720.3		335.6	4 392.5
Southern South American countries		2 344.6	310.0	2 073.7		402.9	5 131.2
Subtotal (4)	0.0	6 856.8	6 188.4	17 100.6	0.0	2 493.8	32 639.6
5. <u>Central Asia, South-West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East</u>							
Afghanistan			10 177.0	485.0		210.5	10 872.5
Algeria		5 555.6	652.7			91.0	6 299.3
Cyprus		9 415.8				90.3	9 506.1
Egypt		2 225.1		1 445.7	20.6	262.7	3 954.1

Regional bureau/country or area	Type of assistance						
	Emergency assistance	Care and maintenance	Voluntary repatriation[a]	Local settlement	Resettlement	Administrative support	Total
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	4 319.3	1 931.4	3 248.2	10 722.6		480.7	20 702.2
Iraq	888.1	1 239.1	2 220.0		2 360.4	420.7	7 128.3
Mauritania		3 637.5	1 066.2			260.9	4 964.6
Pakistan		12 542.3	3 843.6			923.1	17 309.0
Yemen		1 583.7	190.7	1 039.1		111.3	2 924.8
Central Asian Republics		4 006.6	372.3	285.6		277.2	4 941.7
Other countries in North Africa		1 964.5	230.8			117.0	2 312.3
Other countries in Western Asia	100.0	6 516.5	86.2	349.3	46.1	322.1	7 420.2
Subtotal (5)	5 307.4	50 618.1	22 087.7	14 327.3	2 427.1	3 567.5	98 335.1
6. Other programmes and headquarters							
Global and regional projects	10 187.5	46 341.0	14 783.1	11 860.0	1 062.5	50 196.8	134 430.9
Total (1-6)	77 626.7	644 615.4	196 026.4	136 844.1	5 768.8	83 075.0	1 143 956.4
of which:							
General programme	22 056.1	243 193.8	23 421.5	94 841.5	5 002.9	34 971.2	423 487.0
Special programmes	55 570.6	401 421.6	172 604.9	42 002.6	765.9	48 103.8[c]	720 469.4
United Nations regular budget						25 303.6	25 303.6

[a] Including assistance to returnees in countries of origin.

[b] Excluding North Africa which is included in 5 (Central Asia, South-West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East).

[c] Including expenditure for the Fund for International Field Staff Housing and basic amenities.

Table 2. Contributions to UNHCR assistance programmes, as at 31 March 1997

(In United States dollars)

1996			Donor	1997		
General programmes	Special programmes	Total		Total	General programmes	Special programmes
			A. Governments			
			Algeria	50 000	50 000	
50 000		50 000	Argentina			
10 150 376	2 384 788	12 535 164	Australia	11 477 645	10 714 286	763 359
423 871	631 317	1 055 188	Austria	496 543	412 844	83 699
1 800		1 800	Bahamas			
2 465 325	5 417 084	7 882 409	Belgium	3 187 500	1 625 000	1 562 500
			Benin	1 500	1 500	
	1 923	1 923	Cambodia			
11 146 188	6 705 922	17 852 110	Canada	3 308 823		3 308 823
20 000		20 000	Chile	20 000	20 000	
250 000		250 000	China	250 000	250 000	
17 321		17 321	Colombia	19 275	19 275	
12 676		12 676	Costa Rica			
7 083	2 000	9 083	Cyprus	11 054	6 054	5 000
	586 245	586 245	Czech Republic			
22 095 427	33 598 707	55 694 134	Denmark	352 966		352 966
1 000		1 000	Djibouti	1 000	1 000	
5 850		5 850	Egypt			
7 148 509	7 337 657	14 486 166	Finland			
6 049 634	6 698 383	12 748 017	France	1 238 095		1 238 095
6 828 243	15 169 852	21 998 095	Germany	13 810 392	6 198 372	7 612 020
5 000		5 000	Ghana	5 000	5 000	
300 000	10 000	310 000	Greece			
10 000		10 000	Holy See			
			Hungary	20 000	20 000	
200 000		200 000	Iceland	66 964	66 964	

1996				1997		
General programmes	Special programmes	Total	Donor	Total	General programmes	Special programmes
24 000	20 925	44 925	Indonesia	4 000	4 000	
1 739 050	2 119 262	3 858 312	Ireland	58 626		58 626
50 000		50 000	Israel			
7 920 792	5 408 285	13 329 077	Italy	7 185 629	7 185 629	
29 151 100	101 797 682	130 948 782	Japan	33 389 077	350 000	33 039 077
			Lebanon	3 000	3 000	
40 000	54 961	94 961	Liechtenstein	37 037	37 037	
416 126	1 040 972	1 457 098	Luxembourg			
20 000		20 000	Malaysia			
1 954		1 954	Malta			
50 000	150 000	200 000	Mexico			
7 986		7 986	Monaco	7 042	7 042	
15 000		15 000	Morocco	15 000	15 000	
27 386 562	27 246 987	54 633 549	Netherlands	27 978 214	26 285 714	1 692 500
718 658	138 850	857 508	New Zealand	1 034 668	864 600	170 068
23 261 598	14 795 070	38 056 668	Norway	27 255 690	22 629 583	4 626 107
1 000		1 000	Philippines	4 000	3 000	1 000
150 000	96 770	146 770	Portugal	157 500	157 500	
700 000	103 824	803 824	Republic of Korea	1 500 000	1 500 000	
10 000		10 000	Saudi Arabia			
	309 783	309 783	South Africa			
2 326 254	5 010 743	7 336 997	Spain			
5 000		5 000	Sri Lanka	5 185	5 185	
39 940 003	32 125 774	72 065 777	Sweden	36 245 335	36 171 761	73 574
11 142 065	12 149 240	23 291 305	Switzerland	10 771 547	9 629 630	1 141 917
15 000		15 000	Thailand			
5 171	35 310	40 481	Tunisia			
150 000		150 000	Turkey	150 000	150 000	
100 000		100 000	United Arab Emirates			

1996			Donor	1997		
General programmes	Special programmes	Total		Total	General programmes	Special programmes
24 690 770	29 241 042	53 931 812	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	14 016 736	8 064 516	5 952 220
98 400 000	163 756 912	262 156 912	United States of America	144 120 000	90 000 000	54 120 000
11 618		11 618	Venezuela			
335 638 010	474 146 270	809 784 280	Total	338 255 043	222 453 492	115 801 551
			B. European Commission			
12 582 538	134 799 042	147 381 580	Total	65 908 089		65 908 089
			C. United Nations system			
38 452	300 446	338 898	Total			
			D. Non-governmental organizations and other donors			
2 297 855	10 058 384	12 356 239	Total	755 857	180 589	575 268
350 556 855	619 304 142	969 860 997	Grand total	404 918 989	222 634 081	182 284 908